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FIFTY CENTS

ARTHUR SONTEN

A Comedy



BY

ROBIN ERNEST DUNBAR
SOUTH BEND, INDIANA

Arthur Sonten

A Comedy in Three Acts

By

ROBIN ERNEST DUNBAR

Author of "The Detective Business"

SOUTH BEND, INDIANA

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PREFACE.

AS everybody knows, I have been engaged for the past several years on such trivial matters as this comedy contains. At the start I wrote dramatic dialogues for the commoner of the literary papers (such innocuous sheets and lovers of good English as "The Chicago Daily Socialist," "The Wage Slave," and similar widely popular organs—since defunct), essays and sketches for "The International Socialist Review," "The Appeal to Reason" and "The Industrial Worker." I broke into the columns of "Solidarity" under an *alias* and into the coffers of "Collier's" on an *alibi*; then I faced about to make a frontal attack on the less esteemed but more highly remunerative bourgeois press without putting a single dent into its treasury. I waylaid the theatrical managers and their parasites the dramatic agents, and was fortunate enough to escape with my life. I'll not speak of the efforts I made to please the publishers of our present "literature", except to say that I never went so far as to try to hold them up with verse, rhymed or blank. Finally, after I had somewhat glimpsed the difficult world of commercial art and the simple one of artistic commerce, and had respectfully declined the offers of several eleemosynary gentlemen to promote my plays for a small consideration, I formed "The Hoosier Dramatic Club". That moment was the turning point

of a checkered career! Just as a policeman's club is the peaceful means of promoting the prosperity of an industrial people, so an author's club is the potent medium by which to advance the welfare of a dramatic society. Before the conception of the H. D. C., I was numbered with the other ten thousand rejected aspirants for literary fame; after its formation, I leaped immediately into the front with those who have been both accepted and produced! Here is a hint that will instantly be seized upon by the other 9,999! You are welcome to it, ladies and gentlemen, and may God bless you! The way they are building theatres and cinematographs now-a-days, there is room for us all!

As I was saying, my club proved the stepping-stone to fortune, as they put it in our readers. Under its auspices eight comedies were read before several friends and an imported smoked cat. The editor of our home paper duly chronicled the meetings in his society column. At last I was famous! Of course, I took ample note of the effect of the scenes on my audience, paying particular attention to the critical attitude of Sir Archibald. He is English-bred, and knows all the tricks of the game; if I could only hold his burnished copper eyes, I was sure of retaining those of his superiors in intelligence, if not in experience. To be entirely frank—and frankness is my only virtue—I did lose his attention on two occasions, but they were entirely excusable ones. A mouse ventured to leave its hole, during one of my quiet scenes, and

diverted his mind, as well as my own, from the main business of the meeting. (The living drama is so far ahead of the most vivid art!) On another occasion, Sir Archie caught sight of a neighbor's Tom—an ill-bred, ugly, alley creature—and jumped right through the window screen after him. (That reminds me, I must repair that hole before spring!) Outside these untoward accidents, our rehearsals went on as smoothly and as quietly as those of a comic opera troupe! However, I retouched the damaged scenes so that not even such unexpected appearances might divert a single optic from the thread of my plot; I added two mice and one common cat to the cast. (Sir A., who has a habit of peeking over my shoulder as I write, purred contentedly at the word "mice", but shuddered horribly at the expression, "common cat!")

I see I have put my foot into it! Having mentioned three of my actors, it would be invidious to the others not to name them. However, I can not go on with a bare enumeration without making my preface longer (and more interesting) than—a recent one you've all read. Here are just my stars: Lester Diamond, Arthur Cohn, Joseph Brazy, Hazel Berkey, Helen Schermann and Marcella Buckel. There is some danger, I am aware, in making them known to the world; as, although none is "resting" at present, all are willing to "accept a better part."

As I have a high opinion of the art of criticism, I've decided to offer, as a special prize to the critic who will use the greatest number of condemnatory-ejaculatory adjectives in the review of this work—including the Preface—the pick of Sir Archibald's next get. The only condition attached to the competition is that the paper containing the critique must be securely wrapped around a bottle of *Veuve Cliquot*, with the writer's name plainly scratched on the unbroken seal and parcel-posted to me, and I shall give both articles my fullest attention.

(Sir Archibald licked his chops as he saw these words. I wonder if he was a play-wright's cat over yonder? He has all the ear-marks of an animal used to the highest luxury.)

Jan. 27, 1913.

PERSONS OF THE PLAY.

ARTHUR SONTEN

HARLBAR SONTEN, his father,

ALBERT SONTEN, his brother,

FERDINAND CHEEVERS, an apostle,

SAM SAWERS,

TOM JINKS,

FRANK PELT,

JIM BORT,

} members of
the
revolution,

ELTINE SONTEN, Arthur's wife,

ELLA SONTEN, his mother,

LOLITA ELDERS, his sister,

MILDRED SONTEN, his daughter,

MINNIE SAWERS, Sam's wife,

MOLLY JINKS, Tom's wife,

MAGGIE McTISH, servant of Harlbar Sonten.

Members of the Black Oaks Dramatic Club and of the
First Lutheran Church Choir.

ACT I.

Harlbar Sonten's Sitting Room. Last quarter of the nineteenth century.—Fall.

ACT II.

Horseshoers' Hall. First decade of the twentieth century.—Winter.

ACT III.

Arthur Sonten's Library at Black Oaks. The present.—Summer.

ARTHUR SONTEN

ACT I.

Harlbar Sonten's sitting room, Sunday morning. Doors to dining room (center) and to bedroom and parlor (right). Table in middle of room, on which lies the family bible. Chairs for six.

HARLBAR. Please keep quiet while I read the lesson. Where is Albert?

ELLA (*calling*). Albert! Come in to morning prayers!

ALBERT (*coming in*). I won't hang around this old hole all morning. I've got something else to do.

ELLA. Albert! Sit down and be quiet! It won't take long.

ALBERT (*sits ungraciously. Mumbles*). D—d old hole!

HARLBAR (*puts on his glasses*). We'll read this morning (*opening bible casually*) from the Prophet Isaiah, Chapter XXXVI, and beginning with the twelfth verse—

ELLA. Sh! Keep quiet, children!

HARLBAR. "But Rabshakeh said, Hath my master sent me to thy master and to thee to speak these words? Hath he not sent me to the men that sit upon the wall, that they may eat their own"—hem—meat—"with you and drink their own"—own wine—"with you? Then Rabshakeh stood, and cried with a loud voice in the Jews' language, and said, Hear ye the words of the great king, the king of Assyria. Thus saith the king, Let not Hezekiah deceive you; for he shall not be able to deliver you."—Let us kneel in prayer. (*They kneel; Albert not very devoutly.*) O Lord, I beseech thee to keep us from blaspheming thy name as Rabshakeh did to the men that sat upon the wall. Preserve us from all impurity, and endow us with proper understanding to read thy word in a contrite spirit. In our daily intercourse with one another, let us not deceive one another, for we know, with Rabshakeh, that Hezekiah shall not be able to deliver us from the sin of untruth. Amen. Let all join in the Lord's Prayer, according to St. John.

ALL (*recite*). Our father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, as in heaven, so on earth. Give us day by day our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts, for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen. (*All rise.*)

HARLBAR. Now, I want every one to go to church, for it is Arthur's baptismal day. You should take especial care not to misbehave. While Arthur is young for the ordeal, yet he thoroughly knows what he is about, or at least has sufficient understanding to make a free will choice. Arthur! Come here. (*Puts his hand on Arthur's head.*) Mother and I are very proud of you! We look to you to go through the

ceremony without faltering, and eventually to grow into a strong member of the church.

ARTHUR (*earnestly*). I will not disappoint you, father!

ELLA. I'm so rejoiced the children are coming within the fold, one by one. Albert, you ought to be ashamed of yourself, to stay out, when all the others are entering. (*Harlbar leaves the room.*)

ALBERT. I'm going out to the woods to-day. I hate your musty old church.

ELLA. Sh! Don't let your father hear you say that. You know what he said about every one attending. You are no exception.

ALBERT. Well, I'm not going, just the same. He daren't touch me. I'm loaded for him. (*Brandishes a long billy.*)

ELLA. Another one! Give that to me! Haven't I told you never to fetch another billy into the house?

ALBERT (*puts the billy into his pocket*). I don't care what you said. I'm a-going to look out for myself, and there are some fellows in this town I've got it in for. They've got to let me alone or I'll make them, I will.

ELLA. You'll do no such thing! You'll give me that weapon right now or I'll tell your father. Come, hand it to me!

ALBERT. I won't! It's mine!

ELLA (*calling*). Father, come here!

ALBERT (*throwing billy down viciously*). Well, take it! But I'll make another one. I'll not stand being abused by everybody in this town. You won't

see me around this old hole after this, either. (*He slams door after him just as Harlbar comes in.*)

HARLBAR (*calls*). Albert! (*Goes to door and calls.*) Albert! (*Turns back.*) He dodged around that corner pretty quick! What was the matter this time?

ELLA (*conceals billy*). They have been teasing him again, and he said he wasn't going to church this morning.

HARLBAR. Well, he is, just the same!

ELLA. They worry the wits out of him. I'm afraid they'll drive him to do something desperate!

HARLBAR. I don't know what to say. It's all that injury in his head. I was in hopes he would outgrow it, but he doesn't seem to. It's too bad, but no doubt the Lord wants to try us.

ELLA. I blame myself for not letting the doctors operate on his skull when they wanted to. It's too late now.

HARLBAR. Yes; it's too late. When they told us the operation might kill him, we both said, No. Now, that he is so much older, it would be murder to try it.

ELLA. Yes, yes! How many times have we gone over that together! It's past now, and we must endure our affliction with proper resignation. Sometimes I'm afraid you'll let your temper get the best of you and cause you to do something you'll regret.

HARLBAR. I will ask the Lord for strength to overcome my infirmity. But brush aside those thoughts! To-day we have something over which to rejoice exceedingly. Arthur has been a wild youngster,—his coming into the fold will pacify his spirit. We shall

have peace in the family once more. It is all owing to your teaching, too. You have done right in forcing the children to attend church and Sunday school regularly. The lessons have brought forth ripe fruit.

ELLA. I give credit to Elder Cheevers. He talked so fatherly! Arthur couldn't resist him, but consented to be baptized at once. It was a great victory for the Elder. Now we can sleep, knowing that not one of our children, except Albert, will be damned. And I believe the Lord will find room in His heart for our black lamb. Not all the chosen are baptized into heaven!

HARLBAR. That's true, Mother. We'll let the Lord take his own way. But what is that you are hiding in your dress?

ELLA. Nothing. Albert gave it to me to keep for him. It's one of his playthings. I'll just go and lay it away.

HARLBAR. It's not another one of those—— (*She hurries out without answering. He shakes his head. Elder Cheevers comes in.*)

CHEEVERS. Good morning, Deacon! I see I'm a little late for breakfast—but I had to retouch my sermon a bit—I want it to be very impressive this morning, to fit the importance of the occasion. Where is Sister Sonten? Busy with her little brood? She is quite a general! You owe a lot to her, Deacon Sonten.

HARLBAR. That I do, Elder. I'll call her from the kitchen. She is keeping the kettle boiling for you.

CHEEVERS. Never mind about me, brother. I'll go right out there and get a bite. I never eat very much on the morning I preach. A heavy stomach makes a drowsy sermon.

ELLA (*entering with a tray*). Here you are, Elder. I heard you talking with the Deacon, and brought your breakfast in for you. The table is in such disorder! You can sit right here and talk while you eat. (*She prepares a small table for him.*)

CHEEVERS. You are very good, Sister,—but I'm sure it is not right for me to cause you so much extra trouble!

ELLA. It's no trouble at all, only you're apt to keep Maggie from service; but, then, she can attend this evening.

CHEEVERS (*breezily*). So she can! (*He eats voraciously.*) Your cooking is almost divine, Sister Sonten.

ELLA. Won't you have some more pancakes?

CHEEVERS. A very few, if it is not too much bother! (*Ella goes out with plate.*) How is Arthur feeling this morning, Deacon Sonten,—a little nervous?

HARLBAR. No; he seems cheerful. Arthur is older than his years. He is the youngest of our family to accept Christ, but he is the firmest in his faith.

CHEEVERS. He is, indeed, a remarkable lad. You should direct his course towards the ministry. (*Ella returns with the plate heaped up.*) I was just saying to the Deacon that you should encourage Arthur to enter the ministry, should he hear the call.

ELLA. It would be a great blessing if he were called. But you know the scripture says, "Many are called, few chosen."—You are neglecting your cakes, Elder!

CHEEVERS. I have eaten more than my wont, Sister. However, I'll try to do justice to a couple more. (*He eats.*)

LOLITA (*a buxom girl, comes in*). Mama, I wish you would help me do up my hair.

ELLA. Lola! You shouldn't speak so before the Elder. You will excuse me, Elder, will you not, if I assist her a moment?

CHEEVERS (*with his mouth full*). Certainly, Sister, certainly! Go about your motherly duties the same as if I were not present. You know the condition of my stopping with you during my ministry here is, that you treat me as one of your flock.

LOLA. Mama! I don't want my hair braided! I want it done up like the rest of the girls. I'm not a baby any more!

ELLA. You're not old enough to wear your hair done up yet.

LOLA. I'm sixteen, so I am!

CHEEVERS. Let her have her way, Sister. Girls have a habit of becoming young ladies before their mothers realize it.

ELLA. O, very well! But she looks so old that way.

LOLA. That's better! Shall I wear my new dress?

ELLA. If you choose; though I was saving it for your party.

LOLA. Goody! I'll put it on right now! (*She dances out.*)

CHEEVERS. You have a very pretty daughter there, Sister Sonten. You'll have to watch out or some of the young men in the church will be snapping her up in front of your nose.

ELLA. Oh, she isn't boy-struck yet! Lola is very independent—too much so, I'm afraid. But won't you have another cup of coffee? You haven't eaten with your usual appetite, Elder.

CHEEVERS. No; no more, thank you! (*Ella pours a cup.*) There; that's plenty. (*Ella goes out.*)

HARLBAR (*coming in with his bible in his hand*). I wish you would help me clear up a passage in the lesson for to-day, Elder. I'm in considerable doubt how to interpret it to my class.

CHEEVERS. Go ahead, Deacon; I'll do the best I can.

HARLBAR. The question of Pilate to Christ, "What is truth?"—do you take, as the majority of commentators do, as a jest, or as a sincere inquiry?

CHEEVERS. I agree with the authorities on that as on all doubtful passages. However, I never considered that one of the doubtful ones. Pilate's character, you know, was base and trifling. He didn't care for truth so much as he did for popularity. He was the type of Roman politician who wanted to rule without being put to any annoyance. Christ was no more to him than Barabbas.

HARLBAR. I'm aware that is the ordinary interpretation. But this thought bothers me:—If Pilate was jesting and spoke cynically, why should he have said, "I find in him no fault at all"?

CHEEVERS. It makes the Roman's conduct all the worse to give up a prisoner while satisfied of his innocence.

HARLBAR. True, true! But in Matthew XXXII, 24, Pilate says, "I am innocent of the blood of this just person." Mark XX, 15, says Pilate, willing to content the people, delivered Jesus to be crucified. Luke XXIII, 14, reports Pilate as again saying, neither he nor Herod found any fault in this man. Taking all the accounts into consideration, it looks as though the

trial of Christ was not taken jestingly by Pilate, and that his question, "What is truth?" was no cheap sneer on his part.

CHEEVERS (*rising and coming over to Harlbar*). My dear Deacon, I see that you have gone into this question through your concordance, which is to be expected of so scholarly a person as yourself. But there is a field of biblical criticism outside the bible of which you are little aware; where the very gospels themselves are questioned,—not only separate passages. Bauer, Schweitzer, and Reimarus are authorities not quoted in the quarterly, but they are of weight in theological seminaries. With them Pilate becomes more of a historical personage than Christ himself; in fact, of the two, more is actually known of the former than of the latter. In all probability, the question put into Pilate's mouth by the writers called Matthew, Mark, Luke and John—who, by the way, are not the authors of the gospels—was never asked by him at all. Pilate was not of the philosophical type.

HARLBAR. Well, well! You have shaken me to the depths by your remarks, Elder! I was aware, in a dim way, that there was such a criticism current, but I never attached any importance to it.

CHEEVERS. Theology is a study, Deacon. If the preacher knew no more than his parishioners, he couldn't draw a salary for teaching them. I confess I haven't kept up my studies as I should, yet I am aware that I am well in advance of the majority of the laity. I mention this to you, of course, in confidence; out of regard for the high respect I owe you.

HARLBAR. I thank you, Elder. But I can't agree with you that Pilate's existence here on earth is more

demonstrable than that of our Savior's. That is out-Tomming Tom Paine himself!

CHEEVERS. The bible is made up of many writings, translations from several tongues, etc. Several apocryphal books have crept in, and probably several genuine books have been excluded. Literalism has been killed by the researches of scholars.

HARLBAR. But Christ himself is not apocryphal! Surely you err when you state that!

CHEEVERS. It makes no difference whether he is or isn't. The essential truth of Christianity prevails.

HARLBAR. The truth! There we come back to Pilate's question. What is truth?

CHEEVERS. God is truth; immortality is truth; religion is truth! Why concern yourself with more? Take the bible as it is;—the work of man. These larger matters—this universe, this soul of mine and yours—are works of God.

HARLBAR. You may be right, Elder! I thank you for your words. But I can't reconcile myself to your views right away. I must have time to think them over. You have given me quite a shock.

CHEEVERS. Forget what I have said, Deacon. Or, if you are interested in following up the question hereafter, I shall be pleased to submit a list of works for you to consult.

HARLBAR. If I only had the time! My professional duties interfere with my going very deeply into any subject outside them.

CHEEVERS. Certainly! You have your hands full providing for your family, which you are doing so generously.

HARLBAR. Thank you, Elder. I have many trials which you know little of. Albert is a source of endless worry to me. Arthur was beginning to become a thorn in my flesh, but thanks to you and your preaching, that has been removed. I look forward to more peace than I've had heretofore.

CHEEVERS. I'm glad to have been an instrument in his salvation, and especially glad if it will give you peace. Let us trust that Albert, too, will soon see the error of his ways and be gathered into the fold.

HARLBAR. I fear the Lord gave him to us to chasten our souls! But excuse me, Elder. I must speak a word with Sister Sonten. (*He goes out. Lolita comes in, dressed for church.*)

CHEEVERS. Isn't it about time for choir practice?

LOLITA. I'm not going to sing to-day. I hate that old organist! She wouldn't let me play the pieces I wanted to!

CHEEVERS. You're too young to play on the organ: you have a pretty voice; you should spend your time cultivating that and practicing on your piano. Later on it will be time to try higher flights.

LOLITA. I know a girl who is no older than I am, who plays at St. Mark's on the organ, and she plays for service, too!

CHEEVERS. Well, well! That's quite remarkable! She must be a sort of prodigy!

LOLITA. I might be, too, if I was given half a chance. I don't care; I'll not sing again until they let me play! So, there!

CHEEVERS. You ought not to cause your parents worriment on such a day,—when your brother is taking his first steps towards salvation.

LOLITA. Oh, Arthur is a little fool! He got carried away by the excitement. I blame you for advising father and mother to let him join. What does he know about Christianity? He's too young to understand what he's doing.

CHEEVERS. Weren't you taken in at about the same age?

LOLITA. "Taken in" is right! If I had known as much about Christians then as I do now, I would never have joined. Most of 'em are hypocrites, and you know it!

CHEEVERS. How you talk! You don't think your parents are hypocrites, do you? And your pastor?

LOLITA. I didn't say they all are hypocrites,—but if there is one in this world it is that Emmy Bunn! She won't let me play a note just because she hates me!

ARTHUR (*coming in*). Why, what's the matter, sis? Aren't you going to choir practice this morning?

LOLITA. No, I'm not!

ARTHUR. But they depend upon you. They can't get along without you!

CHEEVERS. Oh! she'll go all right,—after she gets over her spunky spell! She didn't arrange her hair so becomingly for nothing! She has stepped from girlhood to womanhood in the twinkling of an eye. There will be many a sly glance cast in her direction this morning, my boy. She has taken the wind out of your sails, and will be the star of the Sonten family rather than the satellite this day.

LOLITA. So you like my dress, do you?

CHEEVERS (*patting her on the head*). I like everything about you, including your temper. (*He goes out.*)

LOLITA. Do you want me to sing, Arthur?

ARTHUR. Of course, I do!

LOLITA. Aren't you scared? I know I was.

ARTHUR. No, I'm not scared. Why should I be? I can swim!

LOLITA. Why did you let old Cheevers fool you? I thought you were too smart for him.

ARTHUR. Well, you got baptized, and pa and ma wanted me to, and I thought I might as well. Besides, I believe in the scriptures,—don't you?

LOLITA. Of course! But do you feel awful good now?

ARTHUR. I'm going to try and be good hereafter.

LOLITA. And not tease me any more,—or hide my doll things? Though, I'm going to put away my dolls now.

ARTHUR. I won't start teasing you,—if you don't me.

LOLITA. Well, you must be converted! I felt the same way—only it didn't last long. It's fine while it lasts, isn't it? It's just like you were going to die and go to heaven right away! But you'll get over it quick,—they all do. (*She starts out.*)

ARTHUR. I wish you would wait and let me walk with you.

LOLITA. I can't—I'm late for practice already—but here they come now. I bet there was no one there to pump the organ.

(*Sound of piano.*)

A VOICE. Lolita! Hain't you coming?

LOLITA. In a minute! (*She goes into parlor. Song is heard—"Hold the Fort for I am Coming." Albert comes in, searching for something.*)

ARTHUR. What do you want?

ALBERT. You know where she hid it, don't you?

ARTHUR. Hid what?

ALBERT. Oh, you needn't try to fool me! You can't do it. I want my billy, and I'm going to have it, too! They can't call me names anymore. I'm going to fix 'em, I am.

ARTHUR. So ma took another one away from you this morning? That's what makes you 'so mad! (*The song stops. After a subdued buzz of conversation, "Jesus, Lover of My Soul" is faintly heard.*)

ALBERT. She's got to give it back! I bet she hid it in her bed room. (*He goes and comes back, sticking billy in his inside pocket.*) She can't fool me! I found it!

ARTHUR. You better let me have it! She'll learn that you took it, and she'll tell pa, and he'll lock you up in your room again.

ALBERT. If he tries to, it will be the last time.

ARTHUR. What would you do—skip out?

ALBERT. That's all right what I would do. He'll be sorry if he ever hits me again! I'm not going to take any more of his abuse!

ARTHUR. Now, look here, Albert! Why don't you put that murderous thing away, and come to church with me? You are not acting right the way you are doing—you'll only get into trouble!

ALBERT. No one treats me right in this house! They've all got it in for me.

ARTHUR. For my sake, give me that billy! I'll hide it where no one can find it, and if ma asks where it is, tell her you don't know.

ALBERT. Will you give it to me again? (*Strains of "Nearer, My God, to Thee."*)

ARTHUR. If you need it, I will.

ALBERT. I need to cut some leathers for it, so I can carry it here. (*Bares his arm and shows a leather wrist band and a sling shot.*)

ARTHUR. All right! When you cut the leathers, let me know. But you wouldn't hit anyone with it, would you? If anyone bothers you, let me know. I'll take care of him.

ALBERT. What could you do against a gang of toughs?

ARTHUR. I could—I could talk to it. I know they call you "Crazy Bert," but they call me "Crazy Art," only I pay no attention to what they say, and you do. They holler that just to tease us. I've said things to tease you, too, but I'm going to quit. To-day marks a change in my life. It may not make any difference to some people, being converted, but it makes a big difference to me. I am going to keep out of the quarrels of this house hereafter. If I can't stop them, I can refuse to be drawn into them. I won't make fun of you any more, either.

ALBERT. Say, Art! I know where we can get some walnuts—stacks of 'em. But we got to go this morning.

ARTHUR. You ought not to go on Sunday. Pa wouldn't like it.

ALBERT. I won't ask him. I'll play hookey! Come on!

ARTHUR. I could ask ma. I should like to go with you—after the ceremony.

ALBERT. I'll get the bags ready! We'll have a dandy time! (*The Doxology is heard.*) They will be coming out in a minute. I don't want them to see me; they'll make me go to church. I hate it. I never know my lesson. They all laugh at me. Besides, they keep me in the baby class all the time. If I could go in your class, I wouldn't care.

ARTHUR. You never study your lesson.

ALBERT. I hate lessons! Here they come! (*He runs out. The choir files in.*)

LOLITA. I hope the church is warm enough. Last Sunday I nearly froze.

THE ALTO. You should wear heavier underwear. I'm going to keep my furs on.

THE TENOR. Of course! You haven't showed them off yet.

LOLITA. Everybody says they are the late Mrs. Cheevers', and you had them made over so no one could tell!

THE ALTO. I suppose your mother said that. She needn't be jealous of me. I don't care a snap of my fingers for him—although he is the first preacher I ever listened to,—his sermons are just like music.

THE BASSO (*to Arthur*). You better look out, sonny, you don't catch cold after you're soaked! You should run right home and change your clothes. (*They go out.*)

HARLBAR (*coming in with Ella. They have their hats on*). Drat that collar! It chokes my neck. (*He pulls it off in a temper.*)

ELLA. Why, pa! I wish you would leave it on. You look so bare without a collar. I don't see why you can't wear one like the other deacons do. Elder Cheevers wears a tie besides!

HARLBAR. Well, I can't, that's all, and I won't! (*He goes out.*)

ELLA. Get your overcoat, Arthur. You'll need it to put on over your wet clothes.

ARTHUR. Ma; shall I run home and change my clothes right afterwards?

ELLA. Why, yes; that would be a good idea! You can put on your old suit then!

ARTHUR. And can I go to the woods with Bertie? All the nuts will be gone if we wait!

ELLA. I don't know what your father would say. He wouldn't like it.

ARTHUR. I hate to stay in the house all alone. I've got to do something! No one ever goes any place with Bert!

ELLA. Well, we'll see. But if you go, be sure to wear your old shoes.

ARTHUR. All right, ma!

ELLA (*calling*). Pa! Come on, we're late now! (*Harlbar comes in*). I do wish you had kept on that collar!

HARLBAR. O, shut up about my collar! You married me without one, and you'll bury me without one, I guess.

ELLA. I don't know about that! The undertaker puts 'em on all the corpses I ever saw. Hurry, Arthur! Don't forget to say, "I do," to all the Elder's questions.

ARTHUR. I won't, ma. (*They go out.*)

MAGGIE (*comes in, goes to the window and watches them walk down the street, then comes down and tidies up the room. Albert enters.*) So you thought you would stay at home? You didn't want to see your brother baptized? Does your father know you've skipped?

ALBERT. I'm going nutting with Art as soon as he gets through with that old Cheevers.

MAGGIE. This morning yet? You won't get back in time for dinner, and then your father will lick you. He doesn't like to have you late to meals—and you're always late. You eat oftener with me than you do with your own flesh and blood. You're a queer child, I must say!

ALBERT. Art is the only one in the family who treats me right.

MAGGIE. Ha, ha, ha! Doesn't your father and your mother treat you right?—and Lola, too?—and me?

ALBERT. You treat me like a dog! I'm going to dig out of this old hole for good. You'll never see me here again. You'll be sorry the way you treat me, some day.

MAGGIE. You make me laugh, the way you talk.

ALBERT. You better not laugh at me! It won't be good for you, if you do!

MAGGIE. Why? What could you do?

ALBERT. I'd show you, that's what I would.

MAGGIE. Pooh! You couldn't hurt a flea! Your bark is worse than your bite.

ALBERT. You shut up, will you? I won't stand any abuse from you. (*Takes out his pocket knife and opens blade.*)

MAGGIE. Put up that knife or I'll tell your father on you! He'll take you out to the barn and give you another hiding with that leather strap.

ALBERT. You better look out what you say!

MAGGIE. I'm not afraid of you! Everyone knows you're crazy. (*Arthur enters.*)

ALBERT. Am I? Take that! (*He throws knife at her. She closes door quickly in front of her as she sees him throw back his arm, and the door stops the flight of the knife.*)

MAGGIE. Ha, ha, ha! (*She slams door.*)

ARTHUR (*cries*). Bert! What did you do that for?

ALBERT. She called me names! I won't stand it! She's got to let me alone!

ARTHUR. But you might have struck her! Then you would have been a murderer.

ALBERT. I wish I had hit her! I'll make her keep her mouth shut, if I swing for it!

ARTHUR (*going to the door and calling*). Maggie; come here!

MAGGIE (*coming in*). Why, are you back already? Did you see him? I'm going to quit to-morrow! He can't throw knives at me! Your clothes are wringing wet. You better change them at once or you'll catch cold!

ARTHUR. Yes, yes! I know all that! I want to tell you something. You've got to quit teasing Albert or I'll tell father.

MAGGIE. I wasn't teasing him! He threw it at me for nothing.

ALBERT. She said I was—

ARTHUR. Let me! (*To Maggie.*) You hear me! And I mean it. That's enough!

MAGGIE. O, you think you're smart now since you've been baptized. Well, you don't look any bigger to me now than you did before. You're more like a drowned rat than a Christian man—boy—I should say. If you had any more sense than he has, you would change your clothes instead of giving me orders. After to-morrow I'll be my own mistress—I'm not going away alone, either—but I dasent say another word! You'll find out soon enough. (*She goes out.*)

ALBERT. I'm glad she's quitting! She thinks she can run over me. Come on: I'm going.

ARTHUR. I'll have to wear my new shoes; these are full of water.

ALBERT. Wear your new ones! Nobody will know. Hurry up!

(*Arthur goes out. Albert gets the sacks out of the closet, and as Ella comes in, he hides them in his coat.*)

ELLA. You ought to have been at church, Bertie. Arthur went through it gloriously. It made my heart rejoice to see another of my lambs enter the fold. O, if only you would not harden your heart to the Master's voice! Then my happiness would be complete. I would be assured of meeting you over there. One child missing would be a thorn forever.

ALBERT. I guess every one is happy in heaven—no matter whether all their folks are there or not. You won't miss me.

ELLA. How can you say that! I love all my children, and the thought that one of them has rejected the plan of salvation gives me inexpressible pain. If you want to make me happy, Bertie, give your heart to Christ. Now is the accepted hour.

ALBERT. You're all down on me, that's all. You haven't any use for me or you wouldn't take my things away from me. What's mine's mine, and you've no business to touch it.

ELLA. I've put that horrid thing away in a secure place. When I think it is right to let you have it, I shall do so. None of your brothers ever carried such a thing, and I don't see why I should let you.

ALBERT. I want what's mine. (*Arthur returns.*)

ELLA. So you've changed your clothes already! That's good! I hope you haven't taken cold. I didn't like to leave the sermon—Elder Cheevers is always so instructive—but I wanted to make sure my boy was all right. How do you feel? Well?

ARTHUR. Yes; but I was scared until I stood in the water,—then I felt like laughing. It was just like going in swimming. It struck me as a big joke!

ELLA. That's queer,—but I suppose it was the reaction. It will take some time for you to readjust yourself to your new life. Everything has been in an upheaval in your mind, but I am satisfied you will settle down and become an earnest, conscientious Christian, and an honor to us and our church.

ALBERT (*beckoning to Arthur*). Come on!

ELLA. Where are you going, Albert?

ALBERT. O, no place!

ELLA (*to Arthur*). You are not going to the woods before dinner, are you?

ARTHUR. The Polanders will steal all the nuts if we wait.

ELLA. But you have on your new shoes,—you'll spoil them!

ARTHUR. I'll be careful, ma.

ELLA. Yes, do, and be sure to get back in time. You know Bertie is always late.

ARTHUR. We won't be gone long, will we, Bert?

ALBERT. O, shut up and come on, if you're going. (*He goes out,—Arthur follows him.*)

ELLA (*calls*). Maggie!

MAGGIE (*comes in*). Did you call, Mrs. Sonten?

ELLA. How is the chicken coming on? Is it baking all right?

MAGGIE. Yes, ma'am. It is a little tough, but it will be tender by dinner time, I guess.

ELLA. Have you enough potatoes in the oven?

MAGGIE. I put in a dozen.

ELLA. Have you made the beds?

MAGGIE. All except Lola's. You told me to let her do her own room.

ELLA. But she never does. Perhaps you better look after it this morning. We may have visitors this afternoon, and I shouldn't like them to see her room in disorder.

MAGGIE. I will, if I have time; but I've got all I can do to look after the dinner, if you don't want everything burned up.

ELLA. If that's the way you feel about it, never mind. I'll speak to her when she comes back. (*Maggie flounces out and Lolita comes in.*) Why, Lola! Didn't you stay for service? Don't they need you?

LOLITA. We finished our music, and the rest is congregational singing. I hate to sit up there and have everybody stare at me all through the sermon. Where's Arthur? He wasn't scared at all! I saw him smile just before Cheevers soused him.

ELLA. Lola! Such language! It isn't respectful!

LOLITA. It is a shame to have him baptized so young! He's almost a baby. The water came clear up to his neck. The Elder had to lift him up and dip him down in order to make it look like a baptism at all.

ELLA. Yes, Arthur is young. Father and I talked it over earnestly before we decided to let him be immersed. The Elder questioned him and found that Artie understood the plan of salvation better than many of his elders. That settled it. I wish you wouldn't say anything to him to wound his susceptibilities on the score of his youth. You are quite provoking at times. You stir up Bertie, too, by your everlastingly poking fun at him. He will retort in a way that will leave its mark on you. He has enough taunts to stand outside the home without your spoiling his natural retreat. You will drive him frantic, if you keep on.

LOLITA. Why, ma! I haven't said a word to Bert to-day! I know he's touchy, and I leave him alone. It's you and father and Cheevers who keep him hot.

He can't answer you, and yet you're always questioning him!

ELLA. What we say to him is for his own good.

LOLITA. You think it is, but it isn't.

ELLA. Do you mean that we should let him do as he pleases—keep the house in disorder by his tardy rising, his lateness to meals, and his staying out nights? While I have a voice in this house, I'll not tolerate such conduct on his part—or on yours.

LOLITA. If you're going to scold all morning, I'll go back to church again!

ELLA. No, you'll not! Go right up to your room and tidy it up. Maggie has enough on her hands with the dinner. It isn't right to make her work all day Sunday. She wants an hour of her own, and she's entitled to it, too.

LOLITA. I wish I had stayed at church! It was better there freezing, than to get warm here and have to listen to your scolding!

ELLA. Scolding! Scolding! You call everything I say scolding!

LOLITA. What else is it? You never let me do what I want to. You know I want to go away and study music,—I've learned all they can teach me in this town.

ELLA. Your father can't afford to send you away.

LOLITA. That's what he says, but I know it isn't so. Doesn't he give four hundred dollars a year to the church? That would more than pay my way through the best conservatory in the west.

ELLA. He gives a tenth of his income to the Lord. That is the Lord's dues. You are not wicked enough to suggest that he rob God to pay for your schooling?

LOLITA. That's his way of putting it, but Cheevers is his God. I guess I'm as good as Cheevers; besides, I'm his daughter, and Cheevers is only a tramp preacher.

ELLA. Lola! I'll not permit you to speak so irreverently of the Elder. He is poor because poverty is the lot of those who accept a call to preach Christ and Him crucified. What we give him, he does not beg for, and if we didn't board and lodge him free, others would.

LOLITA. Oh, I know I'm no match for you! But if there is a bigger hypocrite in the world than Cheevers, I should like to see him. He's got you and pa blinded to his faults. Everyone else sees through him. He's a dead-beat,—that's what they all say!

ELLA. Lola! Don't you dare say such a thing of a servant of the Lord! Go to your room!

LOLITA. I won't!

ELLA (*slaps her*). Go, I say! I'll teach you to defy me!

LOLITA (*bawls*). You're a mean old brute, so you are, and I hate you!

ELLA. Silence or I'll— (*Starts after her. Lolita flies out and up the stairs, slamming the door after her. Her cries are heard for several minutes. Ella goes to kitchen and Cheevers comes in. He hears Lolita and smiles. He doffs his coat, hat and gloves, lights a cigar, and takes up the Sunday paper.*)

ELLA (*returning*). You here, Elder? Is service over? Aren't you remaining at Sunday school? Why, dinner is not half cooked yet! I just told Maggie to stir up the fire a bit. I hope the chicken will get ten-

der. I want this dinner to suit you so much! (*Goes to door and calls.*) Lola! Elder Cheevers is here! (*The sobs grow subdued.*) My, what a trial that child is! The services were very impressive this morning. I enjoyed your immersions so much; that makes twenty-six you've baptized this fall. That's more than any other pastor did all winter. We needed somebody like you to stir up interest. You feed our souls so beautifully.

CHEEVERS. Thank you, Sister! One of the consolations of my severe and exhausting work in the ministry is the fact that I meet with a few such noble persons as your husband and yourself, who appreciate my toil. The pity of it is that your kind is only too scarce.

ELLA. We regard you, Elder, almost as a member of our family;—which, in fact, you have become since the sad bereavement you have suffered through the loss of your helpmate. My heart bleeds for you, for I realize how lonely it is for you in the midst of strangers.

CHEEVERS. You have done what you could to relieve my loneliness, Sister.

ELLA. That is true; but not all that I should like to, Elder. You must look for another companion as soon as your period of mourning expires. The scripture says, "It is not well for man to live alone." That applies particularly to a pastor of the church who is subject to so many temptations.

CHEEVERS. I realize the truth of your words, Sister, and I have made up my mind to resign from the ministry!

ELLA. What! You don't—

CHEEVERS. Just a moment! You know, Sister, somewhat of my circumstances,—how I have allowed myself to sink into debt—not through extravagance, but through mismanagement. It is a painful subject,—I dislike to mention it,—I should like to justify myself to you, if to no one else. Your husband has advanced me quite a sum. I don't see how I can repay him. I have lost my all,—an unlucky speculation! A good friend betrayed my confidence. I should not have trusted him,—the same old story over again! I shall leave my sermons here, so you can partly reimburse yourselves by their sale.

ELLA. But he told me nothing of all this!

CHEEVERS. Indeed? I had supposed—I see I have — Please say nothing to him about it!

ELLA. He nearly always tells me everything. There must have been an especial reason for concealment in this case. My! I don't know when I have been so stirred up as I am over all this news. I must tell Maggie right away!

CHEEVERS. This will be my last chance to make a clean breast of it all! Maggie knows already.

ELLA (*wavering*). Well, go on! But—

CHEEVERS. It cuts me to the heart to cause such a loss to so good a soul as your husband. He lives his religion! I wish there were more like him in the world! The majority of people let the influences of the outside world guide their conduct. Greed, not sacrifice, is their ruling passion. They are the ones who will force me out, unless I forestall them by resigning immediately. An insolvent preacher, to the commercial-minded, is worse than an infidel.

ELLA. Of course, you know best what to do. You have wrestled with the Lord in prayer over the decision, no doubt?

CHEEVERS. It is a rule of the ministry that he who cannot pay his debts must go.

ELLA. We will not press your debt to us. I'm sure, Mr. Sonten never—

CHEEVERS. If you were the only ones! It is worse than you think. I went security for my younger brother, and he let me hold the bag. The sum runs up into the thousands.

ELLA. Do tell!

CHEEVERS. Yes, it's a bad mess. My oldest brother wants me to join him in his business. He is doing well in the west. I have written him I shall leave here at once. I don't like his business,—patent medicines, you know, but it is the only chance I have. "Beggars can't be choosers."

ELLA. Dr. McQuill got rich out of patent medicines. He owns a house on the East Shore Drive, and cuts quite a swath in society. Maybe you'll be a millionaire yet; who knows!

CHEEVERS. I don't anticipate that. My brother is pretty shrewd, and if there are any millions in sight, he will keep them for himself. But I do look forward to the time when I can earn my own living, pay my debts, and face the world.

ELLA. It's too bad there isn't more money in preaching the word of God!

CHEEVERS. Clergymen are the third sex,—they cannot earn like men or cajole like women. I trust to your discretion not to repeat my words where they

will be misunderstood. But you have been long enough in the church to know that I have occupied an anomalous position in this community. I had to toady to the pillars who hated me for my liberal views, yet I dared not say half my mind. I must needs choke down the least whisper of doubt the moment it rose to my lips. I confess the yoke began to gall me years ago. I throw it off now with a sense of relief rather than regret.

ELLA. All this is a shock to me! I'll never let Arthur be a preacher, that's settled. But I must tell Maggie!

CHEEVERS. I've told her already. I had to take someone into my confidence!

ELLA. You told her, and not me! O, Elder! How could you? (*She goes out.*)

HARLBAR (*coming in*). Well, it's over, thank God!

CHEEVERS. What's over, Deacon?

HARLBAR. The lesson. It was the bitterest experience of my life. Your words kept creeping up to my lips ready to jump out every moment. I wanted to shout aloud, "Stop quibbling over texts and look into meanings." I wanted to ask, "What is truth?" and to reply, "Seek beyond the printed word." Yet I followed the cold formalism of the Quarterly exegesis and gave them a stone when I might have given them a loaf. Pastor Cheevers, you have taken the heart out of my religion!

CHEEVERS. Why, Deacon! I didn't intend—

HARLBAR (*raising his hand*). I've known for a long time that the historicity of Christ was questioned among biblical authorities who are well thought of by

our leaders,—but I let that knowledge die away. I did not make it a part of me and my instruction. You simply awakened it again within my subconscious self.

CHEEVERS. An awakening is sometimes more painful than a discovery. I'm sorry, Deacon, to have caused you discomfort.

HARLBAR. You need not be. I see now why you are resolved to quit the pulpit. It is not all financial matters with you; those could be arranged; but you want to breathe freer air, where you can speak your real thoughts, where you are not constrained by the narrow limitations of our dogmatic creed. I don't blame you, Elder. I love you all the more for your honesty and your courage.

CHEEVERS. Those words sound sweet to my ears, Deacon. I have not had them applied to my conduct in years. I appreciate them more than I do your other kindnesses, your financial helpings. This day is a red letter day in both our lives. We will look back to Arthur's baptismal as a crisis marking a new epoch.

HARLBAR. That we will, Elder. I announced my resignation as leader. My class members would not accept it, but I insisted. My reason I gave as needing the time given to teaching for further study.

CHEEVERS. You resigned! What will your wife say?—and the children? You shouldn't have done so,—not at the present time.

HARLBAR. People are not accustomed to question my acts. But, Elder, I wish to caution you against repeating any of those heresies before her. She leans strongly on the written word. It is her staff. She has no other support. To weaken that would kill her.

CHEEVERS. Not a syllable! If she is happy in her belief, we shall leave her alone. But let us arrange about my note. I can offer no security—

HARLBAR. Not here,—in my study!

CHEEVERS. As you please. (*They go out. Arthur and Albert come in, breathing hard from running. Arthur is in his bare feet.*)

ELLA (*following them*). Arthur Sonten! Where in the world are your shoes? What do you mean by coming home barefooted? You'll catch your death of cold. Go put your old ones on at once!

ARTHUR. Two men stole my shoes! They had a gun and ordered us to drop our things and skip. We ran like lightning and hid. When we went back, my shoes were gone! And so were my stockings!

ALBERT. And so were my walnuts!

ELLA. Dear, dear! Put on your old ones, quick! Perhaps your father won't notice them to-day. But he'll be so angry when he finds out. (*Arthur goes out.*) This all comes from your persuading Arthur to break the holy Sabbath day! I shouldn't have let him go with you! I might have known—

ALBERT. We had lots of fun! I nearly killed a squirrel with my sling-shot. I hit him, and knocked off his tail!

ELLA. But why did Arthur take off his shoes?

ALBERT. They hurt his feet. We had to cross a creek, too. I walked over on a log—he waded.

ELLA. You've spoiled your clothes climbing trees!

ALBERT. I only climbed three.

ELLA. And when I told you not to climb one! You might have fallen and broken a limb. This is a lesson to me. I'll never let Arthur go with you again.

ALBERT. He's the only one I can get to go with me. The other boys all make fun of me.

ELLA. That's because you answer them back. You should pay no attention to them.

ALBERT. Do you like to be called names without saying nothing?

ELLA. I don't like it, but I'd rather be called than call.

ALBERT. They've got to shut their mouths. I'm a-going to fix them one of these days; you see if I don't.

ARTHUR (*returns*). Is dinner ready? I'm hungry!

ALBERT. So am I!

ELLA. It'll be ready in a minute. Arthur, perhaps you better tell your father now, or he'll blame me for hiding it from him.

ARTHUR. He'll lick me, if I do!

ELLA. No, he won't, if you make a full breast of it. You weren't altogether to blame. You didn't lose your shoes; they were stolen from you. (*Calls*) Father!

HARLBAR (*entering from his study*). Well?

ELLA. Arthur wants to tell you something.

ARTHUR. We went to the woods and two men stole my new shoes.

HARLBAR. The woods! On Sunday! And you lost your shoes? Haven't I told you not to go to the woods on Sunday? (*Shakes him.*) What do you mean by disobeying me? Do you think I can buy you shoes

every day? I'll show you! (*He shakes him hard and strikes him.*) You young whelp!

ELLA. Father! He wasn't to blame. I—

HARLBAR. Don't tell me! He was to blame, too! I'll teach you to disobey me! (*He shakes him violently.*)

ARTHUR. Leave me alone! (*Breaks away, crying mad. The quarrel brings in Lolita and Maggie. Cheevers looks in and then softly closes the door behind him.*)

LOLITA. Oh, pa, don't! (*She sobs. Maggie goes out, but looks through the door.*)

ARTHUR. Stop! I wasn't to blame! Don't you strike me again! You're a big bully, that's what you are!

ALBERT. Cut his goddam head off!

ELLA. Albert! Leave the room! (*Albert sulks out.*)

ARTHUR. He is, just the same! (*Ella gets in between Arthur and Harlbar, who tries to reach him.*) Come on, you big bully! I can lick you, if I hain't as big as you are!

HARLBAR. You can, can you? (*He dives for him. Arthur slips by and runs out the door, past Maggie. Harlbar flings the door after him in time to catch Arthur's foot and throws him on the floor with a great crash of dishes.*)

ELLA. My dishes! You've broken all my dishes! (*Turns to Harlbar.*) You are a nice Christian, aren't you? To fight with a boy! Look what you've done! (*Holds door open.*) Everything smashed! The dinner ruined! You can't control your temper. Why do

you want to whip your children? Elder Cheevers will think well of you, won't he? A fine example you've shown yourself!

HARLBAR. Oh, shut up! Or I'll give you one, too!

ELLA. No, you won't! You coward! Lola! Help Maggie with the table. (*Lolita starts out.*) Go and tell Arthur to come in to dinner. Tell him not to mind. His father won't dare touch him again,—not when I'm around. (*Pushes her out.*) You walk around the block and cool off. I'll apologize to the Elder for you. I know he heard every word! I'd be ashamed to disgrace myself before an Elder of the church, if I had any shame left. (*She forces him out. Cheevers comes in. In a soft tone.*) O, Elder! We had a little accident! Dinner is not quite ready yet! I'm so flustered! You won't care if you have to wait a bit, will you?

CHEEVERS. Do you want me to say grace to-day, Sister?

ELLA (*with surprise*). Of course! Why not? It's your last time, isn't it?

CHEEVERS. Yes; it's my last time, thank God!

CURTAIN.

ARTHUR SONTEN

ACT II.

Horseshoers' Hall is an ill-looking room, cheaply furnished. In the front is a platform and table presided over by the chairman. Below that is another table for counsel; to one side a chair for the accused. Back are chairs with an aisle between. On the right is a door to refreshment room and in the rear a door. The hall is poorly lit. An old stove with pipe running across the entire ceiling furnishes heat and smoke. It is early. Only a few stragglers occupy seats in the rear.

SAM SAWERS (*enters. He has an evil-looking pipe in his mouth*). Hello, comrades! Well, we're going to settle Sonten's hash to-night. We've got the votes to do it with, too. The boys from the West End will be out in force. All the Jews will be down, and the Belgians, too.

BORT (*an old mechanic*). But they've got no vote in this affair.

SAWERS. They haven't? I guess they're members of the party all right, and this trial concerns every member of it. Sonten has been the whole thing around here too long. He is a bourgeois, not a proletarian. He

thinks because he has money he can order me around and insult a working man. I've got him now dead to rights. Cheevers will make him sweat blood, or my name's not Sam Sawers.

BORT. I don't know about that. Sonten is pretty sharp and he'll make Cheevers go some. He'll give you a stiff fight!

SAWERS. You watch my smoke! I'll make him bump the bumps right. Did you hear what he said when he beat me for delegate to the convention? "You're too new, Sawers," says he, "you'll have to wait until the boys get better acquainted with you." I guess he'll find out who's better acquainted, he or I. He thinks he can use his cheap sarcasm on me and get away with it. He'll find out! It's time my boys were here. I wonder what's keeping them?

BORT (*growlingly*). You never can bank on Jews. They'll promise you anything, but when it comes to a fight, they fade away.

SAWERS. I've got more'n Jews. But you're with us, aren't you, Jim?

BORT. I'm not declaring myself! Of course, if Sonten has been guilty of conduct unbecoming a member and you prove it, I'll vote against him. I'll hear the evidence.

SAWERS. We'll satisfy you all right. He's slandered our leaders,—lied about them—that's enough to cause his expulsion. We sent Fenton to Sonten and, like the fool he is, Sonten blabbed everything. Turned himself inside out. We've got Fenton's affidavit, too. It's a corker. It'll knock the wind out of Sonten's bag, or my name's not—

BORT. Sonten has always treated me right. He done me some favors he didn't have to.

SAWERS. Did they cost him anything? If you worked for him, didn't you earn all he paid you? Is he any different from other capitalists who exploit labor?

BORT. He paid me the union scale and didn't chew the rag any.

SAWERS. Why should he? Your bill was correct, wasn't it? Besides, what has that to do with his conduct in the party? I'm going to show the people of this town that he's trying to disrupt our party and make himself boss. You'll see, and mighty quick, too. Here come my boys, now! (*Several men and boys of foreign appearance come in.*) Hello, comrades! Sit right over here. Are the rest coming? (*One of them shakes his head.*) Well, there'll be enough without them. (*He goes to door and calls.*) Come in, comrades! Right this way!

MOLLY JINKS (*a pert young woman, enters*). Now, look here, Sam Sawers! We hain't through serving our supper yet, and don't want you to go and hurry 'em up so they won't buy any more sandwiches. We haven't taken in enough yet to pay expenses, and don't you bust our treasury just because you're so anxious to fire the best man the party's got. (*Points to stove.*) You'll burn your fingers if you don't watch out.

SAWERS (*fusses with the stove door*). Whoop! That's hot!

MOLLY. There, what did I tell you! You might have knowed it! Any one want any more sandwiches? If they do, come out to my table.

SAWERS (*surlily*). We've all had our lunch! Tell 'em to hurry and get through. It's almost time to begin. Is Cheevers eating yet?

MOLLY. I should say he was! He eats like he was invited instead of having to pay.

SAWERS. If he doesn't offer the price, don't dun him. The organization will settle his bill.

MOLLY. The organization will do no such thing! Who eats, pays at my table! I'm not caring who they be, either. P'rhaps you want to pay for him out of your own pocket, seein's it is you who's responsible for his being here more'n any man I know! (*Sawers backs up.*) No? That's what I thought! It's mighty easy for some folks to stir up trouble, as long as it don't cost them nothing! (*She goes out.*)

SAWERS. She's too fresh! She's another of the Sonten gang! Bourgeois, all bourgeois!

JINKS (*coming in. He is a middle-aged man whose youthful appearance belies his years.*) Ha, ha, ha! Hello, Sawers! Time to begin? Where's all the boys?

SAWERS. They'll be here soon. Here come some of them now. (*Several stragglers slouch into seats, among them Albert Sonten.*)

SAWERS. Hello, Comrades! Sit on this side! (*He gets them on the right side.*) Hello, Albert! You're with us, aren't you?

ALBERT (*rising*). You told me to come and vote the way you said, and you'd give me a dime!

SAWERS. Sh! Don't let them hear you! They'll throw you out!

ALBERT. I want that dime! I got to get some leathers!

SAWERS. You just hold your tongue—keep your face closed—and you'll get it all right.

ALBERT. I hain't going to hang around this old hole all night for a dime. I want—

SAWERS. Now, look here! If you don't stop that noise I'll throw you out. You sit down! (*Shoves him into his seat.*) Now, when you see me raise my hand, you raise yours; d'ye understand?

ALBERT. Yes; but I want—

SAWERS. I told you. Now keep quiet! (*Sawers leaves him and approaches Jinks.*) Do you appear for Sonten?

JINKS. You know I do!

SAWERS. You're going to get licked. We've got the votes to do it with, too.

JINKS. Perhaps you have, but we'll see.

SAWERS. If we get licked, it will be a bad day for the party. It's just such fellows as Sonten who keep the movement from growing.

JINKS. Nonsense! You don't like him, that's all that's ails you.

SAWERS. He thinks because he's an educated man he can treat the rest of us like dogs. Well, some of us have a little education, too; enough to show him up, he'll find.

JINKS. What's he ever done to you to get you sore?

SAWERS. He called me a spy!

JINKS. What? Sonten?

SAWERS. He might as well! You heard that report about me. Of course, he set it going. He's against me because I won't stand for his running things in his high-handed way. He was the whole cheese until I joined. I was the only one who had the nerve to fight him.

JINKS. I don't blame you for fighting him if he fought you. But it should not be made a personal matter. Ah, here he comes now; and his wife, too. I wonder why she— (*Hurrying over to shake hands with Arthur and his wife, Eltine.*) Good evening, comrade! How do you do, Mrs. Sonten! Glad to see you! It's going to be a hot fight. Ha, ha, ha!

ELTINE (*a petite woman who has risen from the ranks*). So I hear! I would be a good joke if Arthur got beat.

ARTHUR (*smilingly*). Not much danger, is there, Comrade Jinks?

JINKS. No, I don't think so. But you can never tell! Ha, ha, ha! (*Sonten and his wife sit down and Jinks bustles forward to the table. A crowd follows Sonten and comfortably fills the hall.*)

PELT (*taking chair and rapping for order*). Comrades, whom will you have for chairman?

JINKS (*rising*). I nominate Comrade Pelt.

SAWERS. I second the nomination.

PELT. All in favor of Comrade Pelt acting as Chairman say Aye. (*Cries of "Aye."*) Contrary No. (*A few "Noes."*) The Ayes have it. Our regular secretary will report the minutes. (*He seats himself at desk.*) What is your pleasure?

SAWERS. Comrade Chairman! I move that Comrade Cheevers be informed we are in session.

PELT. This is a special session, called to hear the charges against Comrade Sonten. I suppose it'll be all right to hear what Comrade Cheevers has to say first, then listen to Comrade Sonten. If there is no objection, we will call Comrade Cheevers. Comrade

JINKS! (*Tom rises.*) I mean Mrs. Comrade Jinks. (*She rises.*) Take the message to Comrade Cheevers.

MOLLY (*goes to door and cries*). Comrade Cheevers! They're ready now! (*He appears, after a pause. He has become portly and his hair has whitened considerably.*)

PELT. Comrade Cheevers! You are here on behalf of the National Committee to appear against Comrade Sonten.

JINKS. Note my appearance for Comrade Sonten.

PELT. Very well! I don't see that there is any use of my saying anything more. It's up to you two. Fire away!

CHEEVERS. The chairman misspoke himself when he said the National Committee,—he meant the State—

JINKS. I move he present the evidence—and not make a speech.

PELT. The evidence is called for, Comrade Cheevers.

CHEEVERS (*irritably*). Very well! You all know what the evidence is; it's the affidavit of Comrade Fenton. I'll not take the trouble to read it, as you've all heard it before!

JINKS. There are several new comrades here tonight who were not at our last meeting. They want to hear the affidavit.

CHEEVERS. Very well, I'll read it. "I, Horatio Fenton, being sworn, say: I called on Comrade Arthur Sonten after the late convention, and he talked freely about it to me. He said that Comrade Cheevers was using his official position to preach religion under the name of Socialism and charging for his sermons. That

he used the name of Jesus Christ oftener than he did that of Karl Marx, and that he (Sonten) would like to drive every one professing Christianity out of the party. He further said that two of the leading organizers of the state are guilty of immorality and grafting.

HORATIO FENTON.

Subscribed and sworn to before me this 12th day of November, 1905.

MAUDE FREYERTON,
Notary Public."

Now, Comrade Chairman and Comrades, I submit that I appear here against Comrade Sonten unwillingly on account of my personal relations with him and his family some years ago, when I was in the ministry. I officiated at his baptismal, and though both of us have since left the church, I feel that the associations of those early days are sacred to me. His father helped me when I needed help,—no better man ever crossed my path. But time brings its changes, and here am I, sent by the State Secretary to press these charges. The affidavit speaks for itself. Any member of the party making such statements about those who are devoting their lives to the cause, belongs on the outside of the party. He is a disorganizer, no matter how brilliant he may be. The sooner we cut him out, the better it will be for the cause.

JINKS. I object to his making a speech until we hear the evidence.

PELT. I sustain the objection.

CHEEVERS. I appeal from the decision of the chair.

PELT. An appeal is taken from the chair. All in favor of the chair, vote by the usual sign. (*Twelve hands held up.*) Against! (*Twelve hands held up.*) It seems to be a tie!

SAWERS (*low, to Albert*). Hold up your hand, you chump!

ALBERT. I want my—

SAWERS (*reaching in his pocket*). Here it is! (*Aloud.*) Comrade Chairman, we win by one vote.

PELT. Comrade Sawers is right: the appeal is sustained.

JINKS. I challenge the vote of Albert Sonten. I saw him raise his hand!

PELT. Did you vote, Albert? You know you are not a member!

ALBERT (*rising and putting on his hat*). I don't know nothing about it! I'm going to get out of this old hole! You've all got it in for me, anyhow! (*He goes out.*)

CHEEVERS. To avoid any question on the count, I'll defer my remarks until the case is closed.

PELT. Very well! Go ahead with the evidence.

JINKS. Comrade Sonten! Take the stand! (*Arthur goes forward and sits.*) Now, Comrade Sonten, explain your position.

ARTHUR. Comrade Chairman and Comrades! When Fenton called upon me, I didn't ask for his card. I knew he had been a member at one time and considered him one yet. Afterwards I was informed by the secretary of the Podunk local that Fenton had been dropped from its rolls for non-payment of dues. As he is not a Comrade, I do not think his affidavit should be admitted here against me. The word of an outsider should not overbalance that of an insider!

BORT. That's right, too! Sonten's O. K.!

MOLLY. I think it's a shame to read such a lie against Comrade Sonten.

PELT. Order! Order!

JINKS. I make a point of order! I move the affidavit be thrown out!

VOICES. Throw it out!

OTHER VOICES. No, no!

PELT. A point of order is made that the affidavit be thrown out.

CHEEVERS. That point is not well taken.

SAWERS. Of course, it's not!

ARTHUR (*rising*). I should like to say a word before the chair rules. You have all heard me talk before. You know I am free to speak my mind, and while there are things in that affidavit I don't admit, there are other things I do. I was baptized by Comrade Cheevers when I was too young to understand religion. When I did come to understand that religion is simply a device by which the working class is kept in ignorance, I resigned from the church. I found others doing the same, among them Comrade Cheevers, who is on our salary list. You have all heard him lecture. He neglects the class struggle entirely and appeals entirely to bourgeois sympathy. He is after votes rather than revolution. Such men are the disorganizers. They would betray the workers to their enemies and make terms with the capitalists. I prefer an out-and-out capitalist to one of them every time. Fenton was sent to spy upon my words. That was not comradely at all. Whoever sent him must have paid him well for his dirty work out of the party treasury; you know the kind too well to think they would do it out of their own pockets. If you listen to Fenton and

his gang, you are not the men I take you to be. I am ready for the decision of the question by the chair. (*He sits.*)

PELT. I throw the affidavit out!

ARTHUR. Good! (*Shakes Pelt's hand.*)

SAWERS. Rotten! That decision is rotten! I'll get you! (*Forces his way forward, gesticulating wildly.*)

BORT. Shut up! You're a damned Pinkerton!

SAWERS. You're a liar! (*He strikes Bort.*)

BORT. Take that! (*Knocks Sawers down. A general melée takes place.*)

ARTHUR. Boys, boys! Let him alone! (*He parts Bort and Sawers.*) Now, get out!

SAWERS. I'll get you yet! This isn't the last of me! Come on, boys! We'll wind his clock next time! (*He goes out, followed by his gang.*)

ARTHUR. Quite a row! I didn't know I was such a game bird to pluck!

PELT. Sawers is a bad egg! We'll have to get rid of him or he'll break up the party.

ARTHUR. Let me condole with you, Comrade Cheevers, on the outcome of your gallant fight. It's hard work dislodging a man from the house he helped build.

CHEEVERS. I'm sorry it ended in a fight.

BORT. You might have known it would! Sonten is too good a man for us to expel on request of such snakes as Fenton! Why, he took a couple of drinks with Sonten, too!

PELT. I didn't give 'em a chance to vote on the question. That's what makes 'em so sore.

CHEEVERS. You made a mistake there.

PELT. I don't think so. Sawers brought along his gang to vote with him, whether they understood the case or not. Four of his Belgians haven't been in this country a month! They don't know one word of English! What right have they to vote?

ARTHUR. Well, it's over, anyhow; and we won.

ELTINE. I'm glad of it! It was quite an exciting fight!

MOLLY. I felt like punching Sam Sawers' head myself. He's a regular detective, I bet!

ARTHUR. It's a wonder he didn't call the police! We should have looked pretty riding in the patrol.

CHEEVERS. There will never be harmony in the state until this question is settled.

ARTHUR. I'll settle it right now! (*He sits down and writes.*) Here is my resignation from the party. I thought of leaving it before, but I wouldn't quit under fire.

MOLLY. I don't blame you; the way you've been treated!

ELTINE (*to Arthur*). I'm so glad! I always told you you would get tired of mixing with such riff-raff. Look at Sawers! And at Molly Jinks! Why, her clothes are a fright. And such a hat! She must have got those trimmings out of a garbage barrel!

CHEEVERS. Your resignation at this time is a victory for us. You admit the charges against you by that act.

ARTHUR. Get what comfort you can out of it, but I am through with politics for good. This occasion enables me to sever my connection with good heart.

ELTINE (*to Arthur*). Look at this dirty old hall! The carpet fairly reeks with filth, the windows are inky black, the lamps smell, the stove smokes, the spit-

toons stink, and the closet—ugh! At last you've opened your eyes. You can see I was right, can't you?

CHEEVERS. I hope you haven't any hard feelings towards me, Mrs. Sonten?

ELTINE. O, no! You were against Arthur, though.

CHEEVERS. It was my duty to present the case against him.

ELTINE. You took a good deal of pleasure in performing your duty!

CHEEVERS. It's over now, and I trust we can drop all animosities.

ARTHUR. I doubt it! I am not content to keep my mouth shut on the subject of religion any more than you are,—only I'm against and you for.

CHEEVERS. You know the rule of the party,—*Silentia*! Let everyone think what he chooses!

ARTHUR. Yet you drag religion into every one of your speeches.

CHEEVERS. What interest have I in religion? I'm not a church member?

ARTHUR. All the bigots are not professors.

ELTINE. Don't get started arguing on religion! You'll get into another fight!

MOLLY (*to Tom*). Come on! Help me clean up my table. (*Tom, Molly, Pelt and Bort go out.*)

ARTHUR. I want just a word with you, Cheevers, before I go. You welcomed me into the party; I supported you as long as I needed a leader. I read Marx and Dietzgen diligently. Gradually I learned that in them, too, hypocrisy had an abiding place. They reasoned selfishly—not purely.

CHEEVERS. Will you let me say a word or two!

ARTHUR. When I am done! The scales fell from my eyes. Sawers is but a type of them all. He is behind with his accounts with the local, and hates me for reporting him. He is not actuated by comradeship, the love of the working-class, hope of the golden age or of the brotherhood of man. He wants to gain control for his own selfish purposes, and when he saw me stand in his way, he tried to have me removed. He pretends to be influenced by the highest motives, when, in fact, he hates everyone who opposes his schemes.

CHEEVERS. Are you done?

ARTHUR. Yes; I'm ready to listen to you now. Go ahead!

CHEEVERS. You are not in the right frame of mind to hear me. All that you have said flows from your personal feelings. Some of it is true, but all is much exaggerated. There is some good in politics, and you know it.

ARTHUR. There is some good in everything—there is more good in literature than in politics.

ELTINE. Politics is a business for which Arthur is not fitted. The last campaign nearly killed him. He takes everything too much to heart.

CHEEVERS. His writings helped the cause. I don't know what we should have done without his pen.

ARTHUR. Leaving the party may be the death of my muse, or it may, on the contrary, infuse new blood into her veins. So far I have nothing to regret; I cherish no ill feelings to anyone—certainly not to you. I'll leave this room never to enter it again, with charity toward all, malice toward none.

ELTINE. And I'll leave it with a raging headache, I'm afraid.

CHEEVERS. Too bad we've kept you so long.

ELTINE. Oh, you Socialists would talk to doom's-day to save the proletariat from exploiters, but you wouldn't lower a window and let in some fresh air to save your wives from megrims.

ARTHUR (*lowers window*). Why didn't you speak before?

CHEEVERS. You're pretty hard on us, Mrs. Sonten. I'm afraid you have had more to do with Comrade Sonten's resignation than he would like to admit. Well, good night—and may God give you to see the light!

ELTINE (*to Arthur*). And may God inspire someone to clean the light, so that we can see it!

ARTHUR (*to Eltine*). Let Cheevers do it: he's God's vice-regent. (*They go out the rear door. Cheevers starts out side door and meets Tom and Molly Jinks coming in. They have their wraps on.*)

MOLLY. Have they gone? You know, I felt real sorry for Comrade Sonten until—

JINKS. Ex-comrade now!

MOLLY. Until he resigned from the party just because he's sore at Comrade Sawers.

JINKS. He surprised me there, after we won out, too. If he had stayed in, we could have fixed Sawers dead easy. Now Sawers will try to be the whole thing.

MOLLY. I'll call him down if he gets too chesty around me. I'm not afraid of him. And I guess he'll have a little respect for Comrade Bort after this, too. But aren't you going home with us, Comrade Cheevers? We are ready.

CHEEVERS. Yes, I'll be very glad to put up with you over night.

JINKS. I have a little business I want to transact first. If you will wait here I will be back in half an hour, and we can all walk home together.

MOLLY. Be sure you don't go into a saloon and get to talking. If you do, Comrade Cheevers and I will go home without you.

JINKS. I'm not afraid to trust you with him. He's my comrade, you know. Ha, ha, ha! (*He goes out.*)

CHEEVERS. Won't you play something, Comrade Jinks?

MOLLY. Sure, Mike! I like to hear you sing! (*She sits down at the organ and plays "Jesus, Lover of My Soul." Both sing.*)

CHEEVERS. Don't you play any songs of the revolution? The Red Flag, The Marseillaise, or Glory, Hallelujah, I'm a Bum?

MOLLY. No,—only gospel hymns. Do you sing "Washed in the Blood of the Lamb?"

CHEEVERS (*puts his hand on her shoulder and leans over her as he looks at music*). I used to! But I've sung it so often, I'm tired of it!

MOLLY. Tom won't let me play gospel hymns. He hates them so! He calls himself an infidel.

CHEEVERS. Are you an infidel, too?

MOLLY. I don't know what I am. I don't believe in the churches, that's sure.

CHEEVERS. Neither do I. That's why I left them.

MOLLY. They're no good for the working class. Preachers are parasites. Say, Comrade Cheevers, I want to ask you a question. What do they mean by saying we are in favor of free love? I have always said it wasn't so, but I'd like to hear what you say.

CHEEVERS (*leans on her harder. She draws away.*) We are the only ones who really believe in love. Love, to be good, must be free. It must not be bought and sold as it is now. Why does a woman marry under the present system? Merely to get her bed and board! Socialism would replace the sordid home where poverty reigns, forcing on woman unwelcome embraces—(*He puts his arm around her. She lets it remain.*) because she is the slave of some man. Remove poverty and you remove fear from woman; you take away her chains which are so galling to her real nature.

MOLLY (*hypnotized by his oratory*). I don't believe I understand you, but it sounds beautiful.

CHEEVERS. It is as beautiful as it sounds,—it is heaven on earth. Socialism destroys the home? It ought to destroy the most of those that prevail to-day, where jealousy, strife, discord and hunger stalk; where woman is tied to menial work and can not spread her wings: where man only eats and sleeps and leaves.

MOLLY. That's true! O, it's glorious to belong to the revolution! I don't care what people say, we are the only ones who are working for what's best in life, aren't we, Comrade?

CHEEVERS. Yet the world decries us. It crucified Christ, and it would crucify us Socialists, if it dared.

MOLLY. That's true! I never heard anyone explain it as you do. But you musn't hold me so tight. Some one might come in and see you.

CHEEVERS. Who would come at this time of night? Besides, we could hear him climbing the stairs.

MOLLY. But do you think it is right? What would Tom say, if he knew?

CHEEVERS. He would say nothing if he did not— If he knew with our knowledge, he would say Amen! “It is not good for man to live alone,” it is written. Yet that is what I am compelled to do in my work for the proletariat. I must travel from town to town, preaching the message of the emancipation of labor. It is a work of duty and of love. When I meet one like you in sympathy with the cause, it touches my heart and makes it overflow. I know you understand me and agree with me. (*He embraces her.*)

MOLLY (*shoves him away*). You mustn’t do that, Comrade Cheevers! You will make me hate you and hate myself. While I cannot answer you, I feel it must be wrong somewhere. I wish Tom would come back. (*She walks towards door.*)

CHEEVERS (*following her*). The time is up when he was to return. He undoubtedly thought we had gone home and went directly on. You needn’t be afraid of his catching you.

MOLLY. I must go! If he gets there before I do, what will he think!

CHEEVERS. You can say we stopped at a moving picture show for two films.

MOLLY. No, no! Let me go. I have never lied to him yet, and I won’t now! You know it is wrong, or you would not try to put a lie in my mouth!

CHEEVERS (*locks door and puts key in his pocket. She runs to other door, and he beats her there and locks that*). Now you will stay and listen to me. I have you in my power!

MOLLY (*breaks away from him*). Let me go or I’ll scream!

CHEEVERS. Who'd hear you? Besides, you'd only disgrace yourself. No one would believe that I—

MOLLY (*wringing her hands*). Oh, why did I stay? Why doesn't Tom come? If I had thought you were that kind of a man! You are as big a hypocrite as Sonten says you are!

CHEEVERS. And you are the sweetest young lady I've seen on my travels.

MOLLY. You're a nice one to talk like that to a married woman.

CHEEVERS. Do you think so? (*He swiftly kisses her.*)

MOLLY. Aren't you ashamed of yourself?

CHEEVERS. No!

MOLLY. Well, you ought to be! What would Sonten say if he knew?

CHEEVERS. He'll never know.

MOLLY (*half smothered in his arms*). I've a notion to tell him. (*Knocking is heard on the door.*)

CHEEVERS. Who's there?

A VOICE. It is I, Sonten. Let me in.

CHEEVERS (*to Molly*). Take this key and go out that door as I let him in the other. Not a word to a soul, remember! I'll wait here for you.

MOLLY. You've mussed my hair all up! (*She unlocks door and goes out, as Sonten is let in.*)

ARTHUR. I forgot my glasses. (*Goes to table and puts them in his pocket. Looks at Cheevers carefully.*) Well? Up to some of your old preacher's tricks again? Who is the lady?

CHEEVERS. You're dreaming. There is no lady.

ARTHUR. No? (*Opens door swiftly, looks out, and comes in smiling.*) So! It's Molly! You thought you could get even with Jinks for defending me by fouling his nest! A preacher's revenge! Bah! You sicken me!

CHEEVERS. I'll have you understand that I won't tolerate such an insinuation from you, an expelled member—

ARTHUR. A resigned member, you mean. One whom you tried to expel and couldn't. The better I know the pillars of the party, the more pleased I am to cut their acquaintance. There is not one of you but fails in real manhood. You take advantage of your superior education to exploit the more credulous and trusting members of the party.

CHEEVERS. I suppose you are perfect, of course!

ARTHUR. By no means, but I am still struggling on towards perfection. I know it is inattainable, but I can at least approach nearer the goal by continuous effort.

CHEEVERS. You have turned anarchist as well as atheist, it seems.

ARTHUR. And you didn't have to turn,—you stayed put.

CHEEVERS (*irately*). If I get my hands on you, it won't be good for you, you—

ARTHUR. Physical forcist, eh? Who's the anarchist now, I wonder? Your abuse doesn't reach me, and though I am no fighter, I can take care of myself. So don't touch me, if you know what's good for you.

CHEEVERS. I suppose you'll prefer charges against me?

ARTHUR. No! I believe in giving every calf more rope. You'll hang yourself soon enough. Virtue is its own reward and vice its own punishment.

CHEEVERS. Every fool is full of wise saws!

ARTHUR. I know what I say makes no impression on you, and I'm indifferent whether it does or doesn't. I'm through with you and your kind,—prating reformers who always have an eye to windward.

CHEEVERS. You got your property by taking the unearned increment from the poor. I suppose you're going to give it back,—you're such an honest man!

ARTHUR. And while you're not an anarchist, you agree with the excellent M. Proudhon, that property is theft, do you not?

CHEEVERS. Most of yours is, and you know it. What you didn't get by skinning, your father left you. Gift is little better than theft.

ARTHUR. And because you haven't inherited or acquired any wealth, you are better than those who have? It's easy to be virtuous; go bankrupt!

CHEEVERS. I'd rather be a bankrupt than a receiver of stolen goods.

ARTHUR. Yet you would have stolen the virtue of a fellow comrade's wife, had I not happened in. Words come easy to you who have dealt in them all your life, but deeds are hard. If you mean what you say, your acts would accord with your speeches. Hypocrisy is saying one thing and doing the opposite. Yet I don't want to set up as judge. I realize that when I criticize you, I reflect on my own self as well. I have few deeds to show.

CHEEVERS. Why don't you write a book? Or are you just a dilettante?

ARTHUR. Dilettanti make the best artists if they settle down to their work seriously. To-night, now while we are talking, ten thousand pens are swiftly traveling over virgin paper, covering it with words of commercial value for newspapers, magazines, books, pamphlets—all destined to die within the day or the year. But somewhere in the world there is one who is settling down his thought wrested out of burning experience. He is putting it down in joy, aware that it is undecipherable by his contemporaries, but assured that it will be understood by those who follow him.

CHEEVERS (*more smoothly*). Sonten, you are a mighty interesting talker, and I would like to stay and listen to you all night. I am sorry, however, to say that I have an engagement and must be excused. Besides, the morning has its duties, and I am not so fortunately situated as you are, that I can lie abed until noon. Before I go I wish to say that I am sincerely sorry—to use your favorite word—to lose you from the party. You had better reconsider your resignation.

ARTHUR. Never!

CHEEVERS. Wait a moment! Reconsider it for the present, until you have let the heat of this unfortunate episode radiate off into space. Then, if you are still determined to leave us, you will be credited with acting in cold blood, and not in a sudden pique.

ARTHUR. I remember your quitting the pulpit very well. It struck me like a blast of dynamite. It was one of the things that shook my faith, and made me open my eyes to the superstitions of religion more than anything else. I could see the contrast between your word and your deed.

CHEEVERS. You are always discovering contrasts.

ARTHUR. I find none in such a man as Haeckel.

CHEEVERS. Oh, Haeckel is a charlatan, a quack! He's been discredited by his own colleagues. You haven't seen the editorial in the last *Christian Spectator*. You should read it. It proves him guilty of faking up drawings of embryos. His gastraea theory is completely refuted.

ARTHUR. Cheevers, you are a fanatic yet. You believe in substance and God; not that substance is God. No wonder you like to preach! You should never have resigned your pulpit! You are still a theologian.

CHEEVERS. Am I a theologian? I, who have no theology!

ARTHUR. You mix political economy with religion and exchange the muddy product of your mind with the proletariat for a living. Excuse me if I seem personal, but you have made a personal matter of my opposition to you, and I cannot be blamed if I try and make our utter disagreement plain.

CHEEVERS. It's plain enough without your taking so much pains. We are personally antipathetic. You are at one pole and I at the other. You have no religion, I have. You have no faith in humanity, I have. You have no morals, I have. You are a materialist, I am an idealist.

ARTHUR. Anything more? Let me retort in kind. I have no fashionable views on religion, you have! I have faith in a striving humanity, you in a parasitic one. I have morals enough to seek the approval of my own conscience, you care not what you do, so long as you gain popular applause. You would exploit man's tendency to seek higher levels, and throw your own

weight upon him as he climbs the dangerous cliffs; I would climb with him, seeking and lending a helping hand.

CHEEVERS. Words, words!

ARTHUR. True, but words that point towards acts. We look into the past; whom do we see? Those who left an amplitude of performance. I at this moment have little to show; the intention is all, and that is something. You have not even that, for your desires are purely sensual.

CHEEVERS. Rot! I am going. (*Telephone rings.*) Hello! Yes, he's here. Someone for you!

ARTHUR (*at phone*). Is that you, Eltine?—You are coming?—Right away? I'll wait for you.—A woman here? What do you take me for?—No! I should say not!—Well, hurry up then.

CHEEVERS. She doesn't trust you as much as you do yourself! From a wife's lips learn her husband's frailty!

ARTHUR. From a husband's acts, learn a wife's devotion. (*Tom and Molly Jinks come in.*)

MOLLY (*calling*). Comrade Cheevers! Come on, if you are ready! Tom is here now!

CHEEVERS (*puts on his hat and takes up his valise*). Coming, coming!

JINKS (*offering to take valise*). Shan't I carry it for you, Comrade?

CHEEVERS. It is a little heavy! (*Lets him take it.*)

JINKS. Not very! (*He goes on ahead. Molly takes Cheevers' arm and they follow Tom.*)

MOLLY. Good night, Comrade Sonten!

ARTHUR. Good night, Mrs. Jinks! (*They go out.*)

ELTINE (*coming in*). Who was that I passed on the stairs?

ARTHUR. Why?

ELTINE. I thought I heard the sound of a kiss!

ARTHUR. Probably you did! Molly Jinks is escorting Comrade Cheevers home, and extending to him the courtesies of the occasion.

ELTINE. She's a low down thing!

ARTHUR. And he has the devil's own tongue in his head. He can split a hair forty ways.

ELTINE. If he can cut it any finer than you can, he'll take the championship. Come on, it is getting late!

ARTHUR. Sit down a minute! We're here alone, and here for the last time. The spell is on me. I want to tell you something before it leaves me.

ELTINE. Oh, I suppose I might as well. But don't stay too long!

ARTHUR. I'll be as concise as I can while making it plain. Cheevers said something that cut deep. I didn't notice his hard names, his insults, his innuendoes, his sneers. They didn't even prick the skin. But when you telephoned if there was a woman here, he said, "There, your wife doesn't trust you!" That made me wince!

ELTINE. You shouldn't care for anything that old Tartuffe says.

ARTHUR. Perhaps not,—but then why did you ask me that question?

ELTINE. I was joking, of course.

ARTHUR. Jokes lose their point by too frequent repetition! I know that my conduct wasn't the best the first years of our married life, but since I have found something to live for, I have kept myself clean in all respects.

ELTINE. Your love for me should have kept you so from the start.

ARTHUR. You were raised as a girl of the country; I as a boy of the town. You were not taught the dual code; I was. When I came to see its shallowness, its sophistical barrenness, I gave it up. Since then there has been no other woman for me, and there will be none the rest of my life. Literature gives me all the subsidiary outlet for my emotions that I need. As long as I remain faithful to it, I shall remain faithful to you. This contact with Cheevers inspires added disgust for all hypocrisy. I am done with lies forever!

ELTINE. I am so glad! But I'll keep my eye on you just the same.

ARTHUR. Don't be vulgar! You and I are not the ordinary Philistine couple, concerned in getting all the vulgar pleasure we can out of life, and cheating each other at the game. We are emancipated from religion and superstition; those avenues that afford retreat to pretense and ignorance. I am now cutting off the road to political preferment by leaving a growing party, which can soon reward its adherents with office. There are but two things left—you and my pen.

ELTINE. I have two things left also—you and the children.

ARTHUR. Well said! Let us devote our lives to them, with no fear of outside interference. If you want to gain their respect and keep your own, you will

identify yourself so intimately with their growth as to become a part of them. You will renew your youth in theirs.

ELTINE. I don't think I understand you. Do you mean to turn all the care of the children over to me? It sounds that way.

ARTHUR. By no means! I shall aid you in every way. First, I must provide the funds for the house; that is no small task. Next, I must help you in the dark days to solve the problems such days always bring. Last, I must look ahead to preparing Alfred towards earning his livelihood at some trade or specialty in the professions. Specialization in business brings leisure for generalization in culture. Then I must help you choose an honorable and alert husband for Mildred. All that is my duty as partner, husband, father.

ELTINE. If you do that well, you will do enough. But sometimes I doubt if you love me.

ARTHUR. All that I've said proves it.

ELTINE. But you haven't kissed me once, and we're all alone.

ARTHUR. You talk like I'm a regular Cheevers, and can't be alone with a woman five minutes without showing sexual passion.

ELTINE. But I'm your wife; not your—

ARTHUR. Wives can strike the sensual note at the wrong moment as well as those who are not wives, or as well as men who are not husbands.

ELTINE. Just because we are married is no reason we shouldn't enjoy ourselves.

ARTHUR. We have enjoyed ourselves, and we shall

again. But sensuality affords less and less joy as one grows older. I am seeking for something to take its place, and I have found it in my work. Creation affords the highest, purest joy. You know that joy through having given birth to the children.

ELTINE. Of course, the children! That's all that's left to me. You must think I have the time of my life waiting on them. I nearly run my legs off for them, yet you are not satisfied. All the easy things you want for yourself: all the hard ones you leave to me. Is that fair?

ARTHUR. If I were not sworn to patience, I would tear my hair. Art creations require infinite pains and infinite love; the children require the same; both pay a hundred-fold for the affection we lavish on them. Until you can see this so clearly that you will not question its truth, you will be subject to the whims of the day, open to passing temptations.

ELTINE. Like you were!

ARTHUR. I'm glad you said "were", not "are". That proves that I have made some progress in your confidence. And now let's go home. Or would you rather go to some restaurant and take a bite?

ELTINE. No, not to-night! That would be catering to the appetite instead of to the reason. Let's go straight home and see if the kids are safe and sound.

ARTHUR. Now you're shouting!

ELTINE. I thought that would tickle you. (*Turns around.*) Well, good-bye, smoky old hall! Good-bye, Comrade Sawerski, Pelterski and Jinkowski! Good-bye, Mrs. Piddle, Mrs. Hiddle and Mrs. Shiddle! (*Sings.*) "We're going to leave you now!" (*Grabs Arthur's arm and dances out as the*

CURTAIN *falls.*

ARTHUR SONTEN

ACT III.

The library of Arthur Sonten at his country home, Black Oaks. French windows open onto porch in rear, and door (left) upon hall, (right) upon music room. A library table in middle of room, a fireplace down right, book cases on the left. Chairs, rugs, pictures—in profusion.

ELTINE (*setting things to rights*). Hurry Mildred! They will be here before we have straightened up! Pick up those papers and put them under the table!

MILDRED. There won't be anyone here except Rubie. He always comes,—besides, I haven't practiced my lesson yet. (*She picks up papers and goes into music room and does her lesson loudly.*)

ELTINE (*holding her ears*). Stop! Stop that noise! You shouldn't pound the piano that way. Hasn't your teacher told you to be careful of your expression? (*After a few resentful notes, the playing becomes more musical.*)

ARTHUR (*comes in with wood and coal and starts fire in fireplace*). It isn't so cold, but the fire will make it more cheerful.

ELTINE. Of course! But be careful you don't make a muss. I've just finished sweeping.

ARTHUR (*lights fire and rises*). You shouldn't bother so much how things look. You are a slave to appearances. It's the inner cleanliness that counts.

ELTINE. That's what your Socialist friends said and let the dirt pile up in heaps. Health of body and mind follow cleanliness, not filth. Water is cheap and so is air. Even those chronic grumblers can't complain of the monopolization of those necessities.

ARTHUR. I've heard you say that before. You like to rub it in a little, because I chose to take the course I did, and go through an experience that others avoided. The right way to judge people is to mix with them, to share their hopes and fears, their hates and their loves. The reason I think I can write something worth while is because I have felt so much.

ELTINE. Nobody wants your dope!

ARTHUR. Don't sneer! Only one who has loved and has been loved can speak articulately of the sacred flame; only one who has been hated can treat adequately of hatred and so on. There are lots of writers who have conquered technique; there are only a few who can put down living words, because only a few have actually lived.

ELTINE. The only people you know are the Sawtreys and the Jinks.

ARTHUR. Such ones speak their thoughts instead of concealing them. Even you must have liked Molly Jinks, or you wouldn't have taken her into this house.

ELTINE. I felt sorry for her after her husband deserted her. Besides, I have to have someone to help

me with the work. I can't do everything, as much as you would like to have me try to.

ARTHUR. There, there! Don't begin scolding! She is here and I am glad of it. We'll find the means to pay her until Mildred grows up.

ELTINE. Molly likes melodramas; stories full of action. Why don't you try to suit such people as she? They're the kind that fill the theatres.

ARTHUR. A good workman cannot produce a sloppy article.

ELTINE. Sloppy plays are the ones that make money.

ARTHUR. They do with a star in the cast for a season or two, and then sink into oblivion. Old stars cease to dazzle as soon as new ones appear on the horizon. Even Shakespeare fails to draw without new stars.

ELTINE. Then why don't you write for the new stars.

ARTHUR. I'm no ladies' tailor!

ELTINE. Then try society drama!

ARTHUR. I feel life too keenly to be interested in filth.

ELTINE. Why keep on at all since you know you're doomed to failure?

ARTHUR. That is not a certainty. The intellectual drama is no failure. The Greek plays are still alive.

ELTINE. But the Greek authors were geniuses!

ARTHUR. Now you have got 'round the circle back to your starting place. If a man is a genius, he can

write plays that live; if he is not, he may, by the help of stars or slap-sticks, write those that make money. It's genius versus gold.

ELTINE. I prefer gold.

ARTHUR. You mean you prefer what gold will buy,—death! The rich die young, if not physically, then mentally.

ELTINE. And the poor have a living death. We'll starve if you don't do something to make money.

ARTHUR. I am watching both ends pretty well. I only devote my spare time to literature. It's my hobby.

ELTINE. And you'll ride your hobby into the ditch.

ARTHUR. I guess not. We still have our three squares a day. (*Molly Jinks comes in.*) Don't we, Molly?

MOLLY. You do as long as I am the cook!

ELTINE. Why, Molly! You don't mean to say that I can't cook as well as you do?

MOLLY. You can cook as well, but not as much! Mr. Sonten looked half starved when you took me in.

ARTHUR. There, Eltine! You have your answer. (*Molly leaves in triumph.*)

ELTINE. Isn't she a reasonable thing?

ARTHUR. Such ones as Molly never use their own reason; an appeal to that faculty in her would fall to the ground. She is ruled by her emotions, instincts and passions entirely. That is why her life was wrecked.

ELTINE. Yet she laughs and sings all day long. I sometimes envy her her happy disposition.

ARTHUR. The southern negro is happy,—because he is more animal than man. We pay for our higher culture by feeling keener joy and keener pain. Do you think Molly would have thought of organizing such a club as meets here to-day?

ELTINE. O, the club is all right! It's some fun, anyways. It's time the members were beginning to arrive. (*Peering out window.*) There is grandmother! She's the first to come as usual, and the first to leave. And there's your sister, Lolita, too. I'm glad she's here!

ARTHUR. We'll make her read, if we're shy one. (*Ella Sonten and Lolita Elders enter. They have aged considerably since we last saw them. Ella's hair has whitened. Lolita has developed into a fine woman.*)

ELTINE. How do you do, mother! Hello, Lolita! (*Kisses them.*) I'm awfully glad you came.

ELLA. We passed Albert on the way. He said he wasn't coming, but he must have changed his mind. Where is Mildred?

ELTINE. Oh, she's about somewhere! (*To Lolita.*) Where is your husband? Couldn't you get him to come?

LOLITA. He had some work to finish up at the office. (*To Arthur.*) Well, how's our American Molière getting along?

ARTHUR. Quite well, thank you. And how's our Yankee Marie Corelli?

LOLITA. Good! Only I've given up writing since I married. My music is all I keep up now.

ARTHUR. We'll have you play something before you go. I love to hear your renditions of Chopin.

LOLITA. I'll try to gratify your love before I depart. But I'm crazy about your club. I've heard so much of it. Did you ever try sending your work to Molosso?

ARTHUR. I've tried everybody in America,—managers, publishers and agents, solely to enrich the express companies. I favor a parcel post for MSS; it would save me several dollars a year!

ELLA. Why do you keep on writing, if nobody cares for your work?

ARTHUR. O, because I am a sort of a stubborn person! Each repulse makes me more determined to go ahead. Besides, I have learned a lot about our American gods in that way. Their feet I find all made of clay.

ELTINE. We are having our fun out of it, at any rate. I believe he will succeed some day in finding a place.

LOLITA. I know he will. (*Pats Arthur on the cheek.*) Poor little Arthur; it's too bad the way the cruel old world abuses him!

ARTHUR. When I started out, it was for the purpose of preaching Socialism to a larger audience. When I found the audience was reluctant, recalcitrant and refractory, I changed my purpose and tried for the commercial stage. When I saw I couldn't please that on account of dealing in reason instead of passion, I appealed to the publishers of intellectual plays. I found them as commercial as the others and bigger poseurs. Finally, I decided to paddle my own canoe all by my lonesome. I got up this club, invited in my friends and relatives, and now we are swimming along famously. The waves of this little movement will radiate around in every direction and finally reach the shore.

ELLA. I hope so!

LOLITA. I'm sure of it. The world is bound to appreciate little Arthur at his true worth some day! It can't help itself.

ARTHUR. A realistic author has to create a taste for his own wares. By private publication and sending out samples, I may arouse an appetite for Sontenium. But here are our members. I'll instruct them in their parts. (*He goes out. Mildred Sonten comes in with some young friends.*)

ELTINE. This is my daughter, Mildred. I believe the others have all met before. Find seats. (*The audience sits on one side.*) They are going to read the first act of "The Unfortunate." (*Albert comes in and stands at the door.*) Albert, you are just in time to hear the new play.

ALBERT. I don't want to hear anything! You want to make fun of me!

ELTINE. No, we don't! We want to entertain you! (*The scene shows a mountain slope in the Alps. The Unfortunate is wandering about in the snow, distracted with cold and hunger. He stumbles, rises on one knee and gradually falls recumbent. The snow partially covers him.*)

The First Member, as Keeper, enters with Second Member, as Assistant.)

KEEPER. His tracks lead this way. Look at this bush,—the snow has just been brushed off! He can't be far away now.

ASSISTANT. He is on his feet yet; that's a good sign. If he gets down, that will be the last of him. Whew! It's cold! Do you want a pull out of my bottle?

KEEPER. No, thanks!

ASSISTANT (*taking a long swig*). It'll warm you up a little. You better have a nip!

KEEPER. Not now! We're too close to fool with that stuff. Come on; this snow will soon cover his tracks. I've lost them already. (*He goes out.*)

ASSISTANT (*sings*).

Good liquor fires the heart,
When Boreas' blasts do blow,
And from your roof you part
To wander through the snow.

Oh, liquor, friend of man!

(*Stumbles over The Unfortunate.*) Hello! What's this? It's the poor old blokie hisself. Whoa, there! I got 'im!

KEEPER (*returns and brushes off The Unfortunate's face*). Yes, it is he. Not cold yet. Perhaps we are in time. Here, with your bottle! Get a mouthful of that down his throat.

ASSISTANT. If he isn't a rum bloke to go to sleep like that in the snow!

KEEPER. I'm afraid it's the long sleep for him. His teeth have set. I can't force down a drop. Now what shall we do with him? Can we carry him back between us?

ASSISTANT. Him? He doesn't weigh as much as a baby! (*Lifts The Unfortunate in his arms.*) Skin and bones! (*Lets him down again.*)

KEEPER. I'll call the other searchers. (*Halloos to the right. Faint answers are heard which soon grow*

louder.) They're coming. His father is first. This will be a bad blow to him, but serves him right for being such a skinflint as wouldn't pay a cent for his keeping. Of course, he's a good Christian—

ASSISTANT. He serves the Lord by turning out his son to freeze. Old hypocrite! (*Looks out.*) The old lady is close behind him. She's a terror, too! (*The Third Member, as Father, enters with Fourth Member, as Mother, following him.*)

FATHER (*to Keeper, anxiously*). Have you found him?

KEEPER (*nods and points to The Unfortunate*). There he is, ma'am.

MOTHER. Why, how cold he is! I wonder if he's dead?

FATHER (*picking him up*). He's frozen to death! What a terrible fate! God has punished us for our transgressions! My poor boy, my poor boy! (*He sobs.*)

KEEPER (*tenderly*). Shall we carry him back, sir?

MOTHER. Come, father, you are not hardy enough to stand this cold. You must guard your health. Remember, we could not help it. We did the best we could!

FATHER. Yes, let us return. But it's hard! So hard! To think of him wandering out here on the bare mountain-side—freezing to death; while we were within our warm home, partaking of the Christmas cheer. I can't bear it! (*He bursts into tears.*)

MOTHER (*takes his arm*). There, father; don't cry! You are not to blame. You did the best you knew how. Poor boy! You're better off where you are

now; but it's awful to think of your coming to such an end. (*To Keeper.*) Lead back; we'll follow you!

KEEPER. All right, ma'am. Of course, you know his head wasn't right. That's what caused it all.

MOTHER. Yes, he was hurt there (*points to a scar on The Unfortunate's head*) in his youth. My, how deep that scar is! A depression of the skull—as wide as two fingers! I never knew it was so deep as that! His thin hair shows it up now plainer than ever. Look, father!

FATHER (*half turning*). I can't. 'Tis I who should have submitted him to the surgeon long ago. He might have turned out a brilliant man,—instead of this.

MOTHER. Yes, and he might have died at once.

FATHER. Better a quick death than the slow, agonizing one lasting for twenty years. We have been forced spectators to the decay of an injured mind. Our cowardice has exacted its toll of agony. We are paying for it all at last!

KEEPER (*respectfully*). Are you ready to start back?

MOTHER. Take his arm; he is so shaken. (*Assistant lifts body and carries it out. Keeper follows, helping the Father. Mother joins in behind—*)

ALBERT (*shrieks*). Stop! I can't stand it! That's my body you're carrying there! (*He rushes out. A shot is heard. Panic seizes the body of readers. Arthur runs out, followed by others.*)

ELLA. What's happened?

MILDRED (*at door*). Uncle Albert shot himself!

ELLA. Shot himself! My God! (*She collapses.*)

MOLLY JINKS. He did it on your bed! Now, what shall I do? O, O! I wish I had never come here!

ELTINE. Albert killed himself? Impossible! Why—

ARTHUR (*comes in*). He bored a hole through his poor, injured brain! "The Unfortunate" was too near home for him, poor fellow! He couldn't bear to see his own picture. Mildred, get your grandmother a glass of water. (*Mildred runs out.*) He did it thoroughly. Telephone the coroner and the undertaker! (*Eltine goes out.*) He is through his suffering at last! And we are through suffering for him. He is "The Unfortunate" in real life,—or in death, I should say.

MILDRED (*brings in a cup of water and gives it to Ella*). Here, grandma!

ELLA (*gasps*). Thank you, Mildred. Artie should never have written that play. Bertie couldn't stand it!

ARTHUR. You made the condition, you set the scene; I but furnished the actors.

ELTINE (*returns*). The undertaker will be here shortly.

ELLA. Which one did you send for?

ELTINE. The coroner is fetching one. I don't know which.

ARTHUR. Molly, go watch the body. (*She goes out.*)

ELLA. I'm not strong enough to go through the ordeal. I'll telephone to Elder Campbell about the services after I get home.

ARTHUR. I'll see to all the arrangements myself. You needn't bother yourself in the least.

ELLA. I wish Elder Cheevers were still in the church. I should like to have him officiate at the ceremony.

ARTHUR. We'll hold secular services over Bert. We'll have neither Cheevers nor Campbell. We'll read the lay ritual and inter him decently,—without lies or mawkishness of any kind. A death of this sort should be treated as a lesson to the living, not as a compliment to the dead. It shouldn't be made the occasion of flattering our sentimental side or of tickling our vanity by covering up our neglect.

ELLA. If you want to bury him like a dog, go ahead and do it! If your father were still alive, he would have something to say about that! But now that I am unprotected, you can ride over me rough-shod. I'm nobody anymore.

ELTINE. Lolita is dismissing the club. I suppose this will be its last meeting. It won't dare go ahead after this catastrophe.

ELLA. It all comes through your ungodliness, Arthur. You can not succeed when you turn away from God.

ARTHUR. Look here, mother! You have a way of turning things around in your own favor and against everyone who differs with you. I've stood it long enough, and I don't propose to stand it any longer.

ELLA. If you start preaching any of your infidelity to me, you might as well hold your peace. You ought to be ashamed of yourself after you see the results of your words. You drove Albert into a frenzy on purpose.

ARTHUR. That's a lie!

ELTINE. Arthur! Can't you keep still! Don't you see she's in no frame of mind to—

ARTHUR (*to Eltine*). You want me to stand here like a stone and let her accuse me unjustly? I'm not built that way. (*To Ella*.) I don't care if you are my mother,—in fact, it's all the more shame because you are my mother, for you to say such a terrible thing. It's all on account of your heartless religion,—certainly it comes from no natural motherly instinct. I was Bertie's best and only friend. He knew it and trusted me. When others drove him wild with their taunts, he came to me for comfort. You remember when we went nutting together and I lost my shoes and father licked me?

ELLA. That was your baptismal day! I shall never forget it! You started on your career as a Christian by breaking the Lord's Holy Sabbath.

ARTHUR. My union with the church didn't make me forget my duties to my brother. That day he would have killed both you and father if it had not been for me. He tried to knife Maggie as it was. That was why she left the next day with Cheevers.

ELLA (*sobs*). I know he always listened to you!

ELTINE. That's what I've always heard.

ARTHUR. Because I loved him. I did not blame you for his acts. I did not hold him accountable for what he could not help, any more than I do now for this culmination. It all flows in a logical sequence from—

ELLA. He was the brightest baby I had. (*To Eltine*.) You have seen his picture,—the one with the long, light curls. Don't you think it's sweet?

ELTINE. Indeed I do! It's the very likeness of my poor Alfred. I've often wished we had taken his picture before he died.

ARTHUR. It was a mighty blow to us when we lost Alfie. We always wanted a son. It looks now as though we'll never have one.

ELLA. Of all my eight children, now only you and Lolita are left!

ELTINE. You have seen much sorrow!

ARTHUR (*turning to Ella*). Mother! Now is not the time for us to quarrel. Let us put our backs to the wall and face the front together. The world has said enough about us already and about Albert. This act will be attributed to our treatment of him, and not to his weakened mind. Let us absolve ourselves of guilt with regard to him, and defend ourselves with clear consciences.

ELLA. But you blamed me for it all!

ELTINE. And you blamed Arthur!

ARTHUR. Heredity and environment are the cause of more things than perverse wills. You, mother, inherited your religion that taught you trust and resignation when you needed courage and resolution. My "Unfortunate" is so close to life that it hurts the strongest minds, let alone one that has been impaired by accident, disease, and disuse. My realism is the fault of the age,—or perhaps its glory. At any rate, I can no more help writing as I do, than you can help saying what you do, for I, too, am but the product of the forces of heredity and environment; the child of my age the same as you are the child of yours.

ELLA. I don't understand what you are saying, but I feel that you want to be fair.

ARTHUR. Good! That is my real mother now, the companion of my boyhood days, the sharer of my joys, my sorrows, my plans, and my ambitions. I despaired of making you understand me, but I persisted in the face of an event that would have silenced a weaker heart. I know, mother, I am on the right road, because I follow the one lighted by the lamp of reason. This was bound to happen sooner or later,—better soon than late.

ELLA. I know the Lord will not condemn him!

ARTHUR. No, no more than we do. But the Lord had precious little to do with it!

ELTINE. When you two quit arguing will be after you both have drawn your last breaths!

ARTHUR. When you live by the lamp of reason, you must examine every step of your life by its light. Argument is the brain at work. Poor Bertie couldn't argue because his machinery was broken down. The superstitious can't, because their heads have been pounded to a pulp by dogmatists and authoritarians. To try logic with such people is to try to compliment a hunch-back on his shape.

ELLA. I must go home and rest my head! This has been a day of horror to me. (*She rises to go.*) I'll leave everything in your hands, Arthur, but remember if you invite any of your heathen friends in to conduct the services, I shall not come to the funeral.

ELTINE. Mother! You wouldn't stay away! Arthur! You'll not prevent her coming?

ARTHUR. I'll not do anything desperate, you can rely on that,—except pay the bills,—and in the present state of my finances that is the very edge of despera-

tion. Good-bye, mother; and forgive me if I said anything to hurt you.

ELLA. Good-bye, Artie! You know I love you in spite of all. (*She goes out with Eltine. Lolita comes in.*)

LOLITA (*calls at door*). Good-bye, mother! (*To Arthur.*) Poor mutterkin! This is an awful blow to her!

ARTHUR (*grimly*). She'll get over it!

LOLITA. I hardly understand you, Arthur. You talk so heartlessly.

ARTHUR. It sounds so to ears that have been dulled by lies. Let us let the past rest and look into the future. There is much to be done!

LOLITA. You and I planned great things when we were children. We were full of joy and ambition. All has gone up in smoke! Neither of us amounts to anything! I'm just a fat comfy old married woman with a neglected daughter and a pussy husband. I sing a little, paint a little, play a little, and eat a good deal. All that interests me outside my narrow animal wants is my work among the poor. I am doing wonders there!

ARTHUR. Tell me more of that!

LOLITA. The suffering I see! You would hardly believe it. Yet the one I did the most for, Mrs. Har-del, turned out an ingrate. She was evicted from her home—her husband was a drunkard and left her with five sickly children, one a cripple. She couldn't pay the rent; she had no fuel, no provisions. I took her into my home, clothed her children, circulated subscriptions for them, and as soon as she could put on a decent dress she stole out and went to live with a good-

for-nothing loafer. I felt so provoked, I wanted to have her arrested, but William wouldn't let me. Now she's worse off than ever, and whines about my not caring what becomes of her. I've washed my hands of her forever! I want her to understand that! I now am looking after a colored family. The mother's my laundry woman. She appreciates what I do for her!

ARTHUR. The same old impulsive Lola, I see. Well, go on with your work if you like it. But it's something of a come-down from my high-spirited, proud and gifted Lola of old,—to stand in the muck when she might have climbed to the heights.

LOLITA. Someone has to stand in the muck, as you call it. Why not I as well as another?

ARTHUR. Why not, indeed! I don't want to say anything that might hurt your feelings, but you know my way of going as straight to the center of a question as I can, and I'll tell you what I think, at the risk of incurring your resentment.

LOLITA. O, go ahead! You can't hurt me!

ARTHUR. We all can hurt each other, but we all can't help each other. There is the possibility of harm even in the fly that buzzes around your head.

LOLITA (*stamping her foot impatiently*). Go on! I'm waiting for your revelation, Sir Oracle!

ARTHUR. Will you promise not to interrupt? It may take me some time to express myself clearly.

LOLITA. Just so you finish for supper! I'm nearly famished!

ARTHUR. You don't seem to be in a reasoning mood,—perhaps I better wait till another time.

LOLITA. Honestly, I'll be quiet and I'll listen, but make it as short as you can.

ARTHUR. Perhaps I better drop your case after all,—I don't understand it as well as I do my own, and I can make the same point by reference to my own experience, and with less offense.

LOLITA. But I thought you were going to say something personal.

ARTHUR. You can take it to yourself, if you wish. Now listen: I shared your ambitions with you in those old days,—I envied you your gifts and tried to find one like yours in myself. The only one I felt at all sure of was a talent to express my feelings in words.

LOLITA. I remember one of your essays. That one with the odd title, "A Good Hater!" It was rich!

ARTHUR. You went your way conquering admiration by your several gifts, I winning a grudging word of praise by my single one,—and that from some old dry-as-dust professor. You got married and stopped your ascent of Mt. Olympus; I went into business and came to a standstill, too.

LOLITA. You have done well in business, haven't you?

ARTHUR. I have made my living and that of my family and accumulated a little property. I've no reason to complain. After several failures in politics, I became disgusted with that game as an avocation—

LOLITA. William calls it a side line.

ARTHUR. It is a business of itself. Perhaps if I had so regarded it, I never would have entered it, or else have gone into it with my whole power.

LOLITA. But you were not cut out for a politician! It takes men of coarser stuff than you to succeed in that field.

ARTHUR. Perhaps you are right! I was too impatient. I could not wait for the crowd to catch up with me. I had to go on ahead.

LOLITA. The artist always goes ahead.

ARTHUR. He goes towards his goal; the rest go towards theirs; he seeks full expression of his emotions; they try to conceal theirs; he is proud of his feelings; they are ashamed of theirs; he seeks to save his soul, they try to lose theirs.

LOLITA. I wonder what makes you so different from anyone I ever met? Sometimes I doubt if you are my own brother. Then again it seems you have never changed; that you are the same dear little Artie that you always were.

ARTHUR. Thank you, Lola! I knew you would understand me. Affection is a clarifier of the vision.

LOLITA. Then you think I am doing wrong in my work for the unfortunates whose poverty, vice, disease and misery make my heart bleed?

ARTHUR. You have come to the point. We can do nothing of moment to others only in our task of perfecting our own talents,—our genius, if you want to call it such.

LOLITA. You don't believe in charity, then?

ARTHUR. Charity work is for those whose hearts are wrapped up in it! If it suits your inclinations and satisfies your utmost nature, then I shall have no more to say to you.

LOLITA. But what else am I to do? What can a woman do? One situated as I am? You wouldn't have me given to society and all that, like the rest, would you?

ARTHUR. I would have you as you want to be. Joy, happiness, pleasure are deepest when they arise from the fullest exercise of our real selves. Your real self is mother, wife. Are you sure you are giving these sides of your character fair play?

LOLITA. O, now you are going to find fault with me. I won't listen to you any more. You know I am not to blame for all that's happened in my life!

ARTHUR. I give you credit for honesty. If you have tried as well as you knew how, you will find no reproach in my words. If you conscience accuses you of dereliction:—of setting aside duty for sensual indulgence,—then it is your monitor, not I.

LOLITA. I hate to talk with you,—you always make me feel like crying. O, what am I to do with myself? You want to drive me to follow Bertie's example,—that's what you do! (*She sobs.*)

ARTHUR (*tries to pat her affectionately on the back. She shakes his hand off.*) He wasn't right here; (*Points to his head.*) You may not be right here. (*Points to his heart.*) The one is irremediable; the other is medicinal. But, there! Forgive me for what I said. I wouldn't wound you for all the world. Won't you play one of your nocturnes now? It will relieve you and soothe us both after we have been so stirred by Bertie's mad act. (*He assists her to music room. A beautiful nocturne of Chopin is heard. Mildred comes in with Ferdinand Cheevers, who is dressed as a doctor. They listen to the music.*)

CHEEVERS. If you would permit me to say it, that music reminds me of happier days. It takes me back to your grandfather's house, when Lolita Sonten used to play Chopin better than I've ever heard him played since.

MILDRED. You mean Auntie Lita? It is she who is playing! Auntie! Auntie! (*She runs out and brings in Lolita and Arthur.*) Here is a gentleman who recognized you by your playing!

LOLITA. Well! If it isn't Elder Cheevers! Shake! Where in the world have you been all the time! It's a coon's age since I saw you last. What are you doing in those sad rags?

CHEEVERS. I was sent for in my professional capacity. There has been a descent in my fortunes since you and Arthur were boy and girl together. I now am only a coroner.

ARTHUR. "What a fall is there, my country-men!" From Elder to Agitator, and from Agitator to Coroner!

CHEEVERS. We will let all that pass, if you please. I had to make my living some way;—this job turned up, I accepted it, and that is all. I regret the occasion that brings me here. It is a hard blow to you and to your dear old mother,—God bless her!—but 'tis only one of those strokes of ill fortune to which all mortals are subject. I must confess, it will be the most painful task I ever performed,—holding my autopsy over poor Albert. I remember him when he had those sunny curls, those snappy blue eyes. He was a beautiful child!

LOLITA (*tearfully*). Indeed he was! I shall never forget how he looked!

CHEEVERS. "The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away. Blessed be the name of the Lord."

LOLITA. That's true! (*She sobs.*)

MILDRED. Boo hoo!

ARTHUR. Quite a Niagara you've brought upon us, Elder Cheevers, by your soft pedaling! The Lord didn't have anything to do with it, and you know it. We live and die according to nature's iron laws, and no other. (*Eltine comes in.*)

CHEEVERS. I know his mind wasn't right. I remember advising your father against trepanning his skull. Surgery had not advanced to the point it has now reached. He took my advice and hence I am in one way responsible for the culmination of the tragedy.

ELTINE. There, Arthur! You see your mother wasn't the only one to blame!

ARTHUR. Shake, Cheevers! I see that you have improved since I saw you last!

CHEEVERS. You needn't fear my verdict! It will be death from suicidal mania. I can assure you of that before I hear the evidence. There will be only a few formalities to go through.

LOLITA. It's a lucky thing the coroner is a man who knows us so well!

CHEEVERS. Thank you, Mrs. —

LOLITA. My name is Elders now!

CHEEVER. Elders! Then you've married again?

LOLITA. Yes. He is my fourth husband!

CHEEVERS. Hem! Evidently you believe in marriage.

LOLITA. Yes, and in divorce, too. Well, good-bye, Arthur. Let me know the date of the funeral. (*She kisses Arthur and Eltine and goes to door.*) Good-bye, Elder. I'm so glad to have met you again! You must come and see me some day!

CHEEVERS. I should be pleased to. (*Lolita goes out.*) The same old happy Lola! She doesn't act a day older, though of course the years have wrought their effect on her.

ARTHUR. That's the trouble with her; her mind refuses to keep pace with her body. She shirks duty now as easily as when a child, and without the excuse that childhood gave. But let's to business!

CHEEVERS. With pleasure,—that is to say, with your permission. I suppose the first thing to consider is the casket! Albert should have a magnificent catafalque in the church, under which a sumptuous coffin should lie, and—

ARTHUR. Cut out the catafalque! And leave out the church. He will have a plain coffin and be buried simply from this house with private services, conducted under the ritual of the secularists.

CHEEVERS. I'm sorry to hear that. Will Mrs. Sonten,—your mother,—consent to such an ill-considered arrangement?

ARTHUR. She will if I pay for it,—and as she has no money to spare, she undoubtedly will consent.

CHEEVERS. And you, Mrs. Sonten? How will it suit you?

ELTINE. O, I suppose he'll do as he always does; start out making everybody mad with his fool talk, and in the end do as we want him to.

ARTHUR (*laughs*). I guess she's about right there! But one thing I'll not permit, and that is church mummery. Simplicity, privacy and small expense shall characterize his burial, and if there must be lies spoken over his body, that's no more than has been done over millions of others!

ELTINE. Why couldn't you preside over the ceremony, Elder Cheevers? It would please Mother Sonten so much to have you, I know.

CHEEVERS. I have acted in that capacity several times since my new employment,—but generally in cases where the families were not so prominent as yours,—workingmen's families,—where my severance from the pulpit was not so well known.

ELTINE. Oh, say you will consent, please! I know Arthur will not object,—will you, Arthur?

ARTHUR. Before we go too far I should like to ask Elder—excuse me—Comrade—confound it!—Coroner Cheevers, why he mentioned the kind of casket we should buy. Are you interested in coffins, too?

CHEEVERS. Only in a small way! I have a dear friend who is an undertaker. I sometimes recommend him to those in need of a quiet and judicious party in that trade. I believe he's upstairs now!

ARTHUR. O, I see! Excuse me, Cheevers! I never respected you as I ought. (*To Eltine.*) We'll leave everything in Cheevers' hands! He will provide!

ELTINE. Good! That's settled! Now, won't you have a cup of tea before you go, Doctor?

CHEEVERS. Just one cup, mind you!

ELTINE. Mildred, tell Molly to serve tea. (*Mildred goes out.*)

MOLLY (*enters with tea things*). Is that all, ma'am? The ice cream is melting!

CHEEVERS. Well, bless me, if it isn't Molly Jinks! (*Extends his hand to her.*) Why, I didn't anticipate the pleasure of seeing you here.

MOLLY. It's no pleasure on my part, after your going and separating me and Tom!

CHEEVERS. I'm sure you are mistaken on that point. There must have been somebody else—

MOLLY (*sobs*). All I know is what he told me! He said you were to blame for it all! (*She goes out.*)

CHEEVERS. A painful scene, a most painful scene!

ARTHUR. We are fixing it up. Tom has about decided to take her back again. It's the fourth time.

CHEEVERS. Oh, I see! You are very good! But I have some news for you! I met Sam Sawers the other day, though that is not the name he goes under now. He has become a theatrical manager, and seems to be prospering.

ARTHUR. Sam Sawers! The old snake!

CHEEVERS. Alazar David, he calls himself.

ARTHUR. Alazar David? Why, I sent him one of my plays and he returned it six months later without one word. If I had known it was before old Sam Sawers I was casting my pearls, I would have taken a second thought.

ELTINE. Arthur's plays always come back.

CHEEVERS. Like bread cast upon the waters! Why, don't you try the popular style? First act, thief; second act, reformer; third act, millionaire. It's a sure-fire combination.

ELTINE. Yes, and we know of plenty of such instances, too! Canal boys become presidents; stowage lads who got to be millionaires; poor girls who married princes, etc., etc.

MILDRED. I read of a seamstress who led the cotillion at New Port and married the Count of Nuttose!

CHEEVERS. She's got you there, Comrade Sonten!

ARTHUR. It seems so, Comrade Cheevers. The crux of the question lies in what is success! Riches, place, power—or the production of a master-piece?

ELTINE. Master-pieces don't get bread and butter. Besides, who knows a master-piece when he sees one? The creators of master-pieces are generally dead before the world hears their names,—and they generally leave their families without a penny.

CHEEVERS. There is much truth in what you say, Mrs. Sonten. I gave up the idea of startling the world several years ago. The practical questions are the most important ones to solve first: after them come the plush furnishings.

ELTINE. Just what I have told Arthur a hundred times,—but he won't listen to me. He's awful stubborn.

ARTHUR. I suppose you would rather have a man like Sam Sawers—excuse me—Alazar David for your husband, wouldn't you?

ELTINE. He makes money, anyways, and you don't!

ARTHUR. No one around here is starving to death, is there? If I had to sell myself as often as Sam Sawers has to sell himself, I'd rather we'd all starve at once. A man can yet exist in this country without prostituting himself. Give me a fair degree of comfort,

simple necessities, and leisure hours, and I wouldn't trade places with all your Sam Sawers in the universe. I know, with such views, my work is bound to be appreciated by minds of delicacy and high intelligence; without such a hope I would have no incentive to write. One word of appreciation and cheer from a master is worth more than all the applause of the vulgar!

CHEEVERS. Oh, so you, too, despise the rabble! What is it Horace says: "*odi profanum vulgus et arceo*,"—I hate the vulgar crowd and I keep it aloof. You are in the way of being an aristocrat. What would become of our democratic institutions, if we should all accept your views?

ARTHUR. If everyone accepted them, the rabble would become aristocratic, too. In fact, that is the very thing that is occurring. Under monarchical government the few progress materially and spiritually; in a democracy the many go forward together.

CHEEVERS. Yet there is a great inequality of wealth; capital is concentrated in a few hands. We have a few billionaires who own the country.

ARTHUR. They do not own people of independent minds. They do not own the free spirits, the inventors, artists, musicians, scientists, philosophers, poets. These can't be bought. The way to make wealth harmless is to respect genius.

ELTINE. I prefer wealth to genius.

MILDRED. So do I.

CHEEVERS. There you have your answer in your own family.

ARTHUR. They do not mean all they say. They are not such thorough-going Philistines as they would have it appear. Eltine is interested in scientific breeding in a dilettante way; Mildred likes her music pretty well; I am devoted to literature. You might say there is no money in any of those branches, yet we spend considerable time on them, and derive more pleasure from them than we could get from mere wealth.

CHEEVERS. There is money in all of those pursuits if you go after it right.

ELTINE. Those are my very words. I've told Arthur that a thousand times.

CHEEVERS. Your husband has always been noted for being head-strong, if he will pardon me for saying it.

ARTHUR. Cheevers, I'm glad you're here to talk to. You are accustomed to using your reason. I can appeal to that without fear of arousing your emotions. Women have been treated as passionate children devoid of logic for so many centuries that it is unsatisfactory to argue with the brightest of the sex. They let their feelings sway their judgment. I say that as a truism, and not as a reproach.

ELTINE. Oh, I know you hold us way beneath you! Yet you have had enough to do with women in your life, land knows!

ARTHUR. I associated with what was nearest at hand. The whole matter of woman's inferiority can be summed up in one word—slavery. When she gains equal political rights with man, she will take her place by his side,—as an equal.

CHEEVERS. I heartily favor woman's suffrage. It is as you say, a step towards her emancipation, but only a step. Neither man nor woman will be free, however, until the abolition of capitalism and the inauguration of the co-operative commonwealth.

ARTHUR. That's cant Socialism!

ELTINE. I have no use for Socialism or Socialists. I don't bother my head about voting, either.

CHEEVERS. I don't thing so well of some of them as I used to. They didn't treat me right. Yet the pettiness of a few misguided so-called leaders ought not to blind our eyes to the essential justice of the plan.

ARTHUR. Plan is a good word for it! Plan of salvation! Mankind cannot be saved by any plan, religious or economic. There is growth, evolution in everything. Progressives seek to aid evolution; they accept the law and try to extend it; they stimulate the development of peoples like horticulturists do that of plants. They are three classes of people: conservatives, who shut their eyes to the growth of the world and try to prevent it.

CHEEVERS. The stand-patters!

ARTHUR. So they are called derisively. Then, there are the Philistines, who count nothing either for or against betterment.

CHEEVERS. The mob!

ARTHUR. Lastly, there are the few courageous and enlightened spirits whose main business in life is to foster all improvement.

CHEEVERS. The remnant!



ARTHUR. The world calls them many names, mostly opprobrious. I term them the geniuses,—for, at bottom, genius is but a higher sort of courage,—the courage to believe in one's own ability.

CHEEVERS. I call it nerve.

ARTHUR. A disparaging term, which you would hardly use to characterize the state of mind that led Aristotle to foreshadow the physical world, Shakespeare to picture the human mind, Darwin to open the book of nature.

ELTINE. All men!

CHEEVERS. And all exceptions! They were born great.

ARTHUR. Only men have been free enough in the past to look farther ahead than one generation, and I suspect even with the complete emancipation of woman, she will not look much farther than that. She will, however, look that far instead of seeing only the present moment, as the great majority of them do now.

MILDRED. I read in a book; man lives in the future, woman in the present.

ARTHUR. That's the thought! And most men are women in that respect! Goethe thought the highest title he could aspire to was to be called a man.

CHEEVERS. Goethe is no fit example to follow! He was an immoral aristocrat!

ARTHUR. Belittle the great, because to understand them requires greatness, too. But I see Eltine fidgeting, and by that I judge it is getting near supper time. I should like to invite you to stay.

ELTINE. Arthur! We have nothing cooked up! He can have a dish of ice cream!

CHEEVERS. I'm just as much obliged, but I must go back and make out my report. (*Rises.*) So you leave everything in my hands?

ELTINE. Everything!

CHEEVERS. I think I understand what you want, and I'll take the greatest pains to satisfy you completely. I have enjoyed this little visit immensely, and after this sad occurrence has lost its poignancy, I should like to spend a Sunday afternoon in continuance of our discussion. And now if you will be good enough to tell me where I may see the corpse.—(*To Eltine, offering to show him.*) No, no! I'll find the way—mere formality, you know,—entirely unnecessary, but entitles me to the fee. I'll impanel a jury of my cronies for the inquest, who will find as I direct. And so, good day to you all!

ELTINE. Good day, Doctor. (*He goes out.*) I'm glad to get rid of the old hypocrite! I could hardly stand him. Why did you keep him so long? I was sitting on needles all the time! But you would talk to a post after you got started.

MILDRED. I like to hear him talk. It was like my sociology teacher says at school. (*She goes out.*)

ARTHUR. It leaves a bad taste in my mouth to listen to a thorough-going old scoundrel like Cheevers,—but he is no fool,—that is his redeeming trait.

ELTINE. And I am! I thought you would say that before you finished. Well, anyways, I didn't drive my own brother to a suicide's grave!

ARTHUR (*imperturbably*). You pick out an insult where none is meant, but perhaps I am entitled to it by the undue severity of my remarks about Cheev-

ers. I am, of course, partly responsible for Bertie's death. He could not bear to look upon "The Unfortunate"—but the cause of his mind being so weak must be laid on accident and the neglect of others. I never have sought popularity directly, but now I am in the way of having it thrust upon me; for there is no doubt about it, Bertie's death is popular. Mother is relieved of the pain of witnessing each day the proof of her own dereliction, and Lolita will draw a full breath now that she can not be taunted with having a crazy brother. I did what a surgeon would have done by an operation,—only the surgeon would have killed him and charged an enormous fee for doing it;—I did it for nothing.

ELTINE. You confess you are the murderer of your brother,—a fratricide! You make me shudder.

ARTHUR. I am, on the contrary, the preserver of my family. A month or two after the funeral, you will all be acknowledging that fact,—at least tacitly. The Twentieth Century Flier was popular, although it killed scores every year. It was abandoned because it cost too much to run; not because it was a death machine. Death is the most popular thing in the world! People run to greet her with smiles, toasts, huzzas, laughter, shouts, whistles, ringing of bells and bacchanalian tumult. That is why only one person out of a thousand lives out his natural four score; the other 999 go to greet their false friend long before she calls them.

ELTINE. I suppose babies are to blame for dying,—they bring it on themselves!

ARTHUR. Parents whose course is directed by ignorance, pride, superstition or passion, lose the larger

share of their babies. Among the emancipated, death is a rare visitor. They fight her at her first approach: they drive her away as soon as she stops at the gate. They love life because life is precious to them; life enables them to do the work they have planned; death stops the sculptor's hand before the marble is finished.

ELTINE. I have seen that frieze! I didn't gather its full meaning at first view.

ARTHUR. If you will pull down the shades, I'll throw the picture on the wall. I bought a slide Saturday. (*Eltine pulls down the shades. A picture of "Death Staying the Hand of the Sculptor" is thrown on a screen on the back wall.*) The foe of the artist would soul is full of love. The friend of the Philistine, whose soul is filled with greed and lust. (*The picture fades away.*)

ELTINE (*throwing herself into Arthur's arms*). Oh, Arthur! Forgive me for what I said! I love you and I believe in you! You are for me the true, the good and the beautiful!

ARTHUR. There, there, Tiny! Don't go from one extreme to the other, like a teetering balance! I am a good husband to you, and a good father to Mildred, —and you are a good wife and mother. Whether we are anything more than that, we'll have to leave to posterity to settle.

ELTINE. But you do love me, don't you, Arthur? (*He smiles at her tolerantly as the final*

CURTAIN falls.

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